

— PROPHECY —

OR SPEAKING FOR GOD

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PROPHECY

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SPEAKING FOR GOD

BY

REV. EVERETT S. STACKPOLE, D.D.

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PREFACE.

THE best philosophy is in accord with Paul, that truth is spiritually discerned. It is refreshing to read this from Professor Bowne:¹ "Truth, as such, is not dependent on demonstration, but exists eternally in its own right. Demonstration is only a makeshift for helping ignorance to insight. It is a stimulus to the mind of the learner to think in certain ways which shall lead him at last to see the truth proposed." The truth here expressed seems to be at the bottom of Plato's teaching, that to learn is nothing else than to remember. The mathematical demonstration only helps to the recognition of knowledge native to the soul. In vain are all proofs and evidences unless the learner is led thereby to independent vision. Intuitive theology is the only

¹ "Philosophy of Theism," p. 31.

kind that satisfies. Historical theology is valuable only as it actually reveals God and truth. A mere record of what men once believed and did is as likely to lead into error as into truth.

God is the author of truth. It is the expression of the divine nature. The soul that is possessed of God is possessed of truth. He cannot possess the whole of truth in conscious recognition; but the truth must possess the whole of him, if he is to make any advance in recognition of it. Then it can progressively disclose itself. Some have to rub their eyes and rack their brains in order to see what to others is an open vision. Logic is needed only where intuitive power is lacking. A common illustration of this is the interrogation at the end of an argument or statement: "Do you see?" If the listener does not *see*, words have been wasted. A still greater waste is the multiplication of words after the truth is seen.

Many of the sayings of Christ are short, pithy utterances of self-evident truth. Be-

cause they were such, he demanded assent to them. He did not try to prove truth; he simply stated it. Those who did not and would not assent, showed thereby their moral blindness and preference for lies. He that is of God heareth God's words. If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine.

In order to see, three conditions are necessary: (1) something to be seen; (2) the power of vision; (3) a willingness to look in the right direction. The first condition is allowed by common consent. We live in a world of realities. Things may not be what they at first seem, yet they are not utter delusions. There is truth, and it can be discovered. Power of vision for the beholding of objects and the discovery of truth is a common gift, to be developed and improved by degrees. It is not always trustworthy, yet is instinctively trusted. All that the senses bring into the mind has to be corrected by reflection. Sights and sounds must be interpreted by thought. If our senses report

things that contradict the perceptions of others, it is to be feared that something is wrong. So the spiritual senses must be tested by the experience of the wise and good. The proper conditions of age and culture must be observed. But most surely whatever of truth has been intuitively perceived by others is discernible by all who meet the conditions, and with far greater ease after reading the descriptions of former beholders.

The main obstacle to seeing what others have seen is an unwillingness to look the right way. The opponents of Galileo would not look through his telescope for fear that their theories of astronomy would be refuted by the vision. He who would perceive the truth must have the eye single, and must look where God points. In any given direction he must see all that others before him have seen ere he can discover anything beyond.

The pure in heart see God, and the things of God. This power of spiritual intuition is to be trusted oftentimes rather than logical process. Let some of the dogmas of tradi-

tional theology be tested by it. Good men, misled by supposed authority and by logic, have taught that God has unconditionally decreed the eternal salvation of a few and the eternal damnation of the many. Can any pure soul, in moments of the greatest spiritual uplift, assent to that without hesitation? Does it not contradict the God within him? Some have declared that the saved will take delight in witnessing the endless tortures of the lost. Was that a revelation given to spiritual intuition? No open-minded person, unbiassed by logic, traditions, and authority, can believe that.

The truth must be *seen*. Give heed to the prophetic word *until* the day dawn. If the day does not dawn, there is something wrong, either with the supposed word of prophecy, or with the eyesight of the gazer. Let every one see for himself before testifying to the reality of asserted truths. The truths revealed through ancient prophets are the same as those revealed now in the heavens, in history, in conscience, and in religious

experience. Spiritual insight is the prime condition of beholding them. If this book shall not succeed in opening the eyes of the blind, it is hoped at least that it will induce some who see dimly to look earnestly and patiently in the right direction.

Lectures, of which this book is the outgrowth, have been delivered before the School of Theology of Boston University, Bangor Theological Seminary, and Cobb Divinity School. This explains its directness of style.

E. S. S.

AUBURN, ME., *January*, 1896.

I.

PROPHECY DEFINED.

WHAT our land cries for is a man of the people to speak for Christ, a man who has grown up amid all the oppressions and grievances and hardships and temptations of the lowest class in our society, and who through and by means of all his experience has learned the value of Christ for himself and for his fellows; a man who can stand free from all professionalism, from all traditions and creeds and conventions, who can say, "I am not a prophet, nay, nor the son of a prophet;" who can take his stand simply on his manhood, and from that widest and firmest platform can proclaim to men the unsearchable riches of Jesus Christ. If ever any age needed a man like John the Baptist it is our own,—a man of absolute fearlessness, and, what is even better, of absolute independence; a man who asks nothing from society, not even food, clothes, or shelter; a man free to utter his convictions, and to summon his fellowmen to listen to conscience and to God; a man who is simply a voice, whose sole function in life it is to speak for righteousness and prepare the way for the Messiah.

PROFESSOR MARCUS DODS.

PROPHECY;

OR, SPEAKING FOR GOD.

I.

PROPHECY DEFINED.

RELIGIOUS convictions above all others seek an expression. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth must speak. The same divine Spirit that inbreathes the conviction also impels the utterance. The Spirit of God acting upon the spirit of man makes known certain moral and religious truths. They are called religious instincts or intuitions. They are revelations of God within us. Revelations of such sort are given to all moral creatures. The truths so revealed are universal and self-evident, yet may be, and have been, obscured and hidden by neglect of truth

and disobedience thereto. He who reflects most, communes with his own heart, and prayerfully calls upon God for light, perceives most clearly these great fundamental truths of morality and religion. He finds God first within himself; and this knowledge of God, gained more and more clearly by prayer and communion, enables him to see God outwardly revealed in the works of creation and in the ways of Providence, which are a revelation of his moral nature and government. His soul may become so filled with God, he may be so conscious of the divine indwelling, his thoughts may be so occupied with divine things, that he sees God everywhere and in all events. The heavens declare his glory. The earth is his footstool. The stars and planets are his marshalled hosts. He speaks in the thunder and in the wind. His eye looks out from behind the cloud in the lightning flash. His mighty arm shakes terribly the earth in the upheaval of a volcano. The tempest is the breath of his nostrils. He upheaves the foaming sea, and calms the tur-

bulent winds. He waters the earth, and causes it to bring forth fruit. In fine, what the heathen nations have ascribed to thousands of gods, this "God-intoxicated man" refers to the one true God everywhere present and active. He is in the tiniest particle of matter and in the minutest event of the individual life, while the heaven of heavens cannot contain him.

Still more clearly is God recognized in the events of individual and of national life. Here especially he is revealed as Judge. Conscience refers all acts to his decision; and all events ordered or permitted are expressions of his moral approval or of retributive justice. The reception of any good whatever is evidence of God's favor, and calamity is his rebuke for sin. Anything unusual is a miracle of his grace or of his righteous indignation. The strong east wind,¹ the overshadowing cloud, the stars in their courses,² all the forces of nature, are at God's disposal for the defence of his people. Pestilence is his destroying

¹ *Exod. xiv. 21.*

² *Judges v. 20.*

angel,¹ sent to strike with death the wicked and rebellious. War is his national scourge; and God himself, with drawn sword, leads on the armed hosts.² The earthquake is the movement of his mighty arm, threatening destruction to the ungodly. The cloud of locusts³ are his avengers, ushering in the terrible day of the Lord. God sits in the heavens and orders all below. His kingdom ruleth over all.

In all ages and in all lands there have been "priests of the most high God," like Melchisedec, who without any book revelation have found out God, though not to perfection; have felt his presence in their souls, and seen him in his varied manifestations. The habit of the Hebrew mind especially was to overlook all so-called secondary causes,⁴ and

¹ 2 Sam. xxiv. 15, 16.

² Josh. v. 13-15.

³ Joel ii. 1-11.

⁴ Professor James A. Craig, in the introduction to his "Assyrian and Babylonian Religious Texts," says that, "Both Babylonians and Hebrews were strangers to the doctrine of secondary causes, — a doctrine introduced by the Greeks; and both re-

to trace every event directly to Jehovah. His mighty and judicial presence was everywhere felt. Truly in him they lived, and moved, and had their being. There were men, of course, who possessed this consciousness of God to a remarkable degree. Their thoughts concerning him were objectified so that they saw his glory and heard his voice. Psychologically, the manifestation was subjective, but to unreflecting common-sense it was objective. The spiritual Being was apparently materialized. It mattered not whether the manifestation was by dream, or vision, or ecstatic trance, it was all real to the subject. It was the objectification of his inwrought thoughts, feelings, and convictions. What we call conscientious convictions were a "Thus saith the Lord" unto him. Strong impressions were God's pressure upon his spirit. The guarded the monitions of conscience, for which there is no word in early literature until the time of Zeno (cir. 320 B.C.), as the voice of deity; two facts which, it appears to me, it is customary to overlook in the study of the Old Testament, though they are two of the most important to bear in mind." — See the *Independent* of Dec. 19, 1895.

troubled conscience felt the hand of God laid heavy upon it.¹ The impulse to rebuke sin and preach righteousness was as a burning fire shut up in his bones.² The call to prophesy or speak for God was heard like the roaring of a lion.³ A necessity was laid upon him, and he could not but speak the things which he had seen and heard. Sometimes the prophet felt himself to be so possessed and wrapped up in God that he seems to have lost consciousness of his own identity, and to speak in the first person with divine authority. Then exhortation becomes command. The "word of the Lord" has come unto him in the shape of an intense conviction wrought in his soul. The things that other people only dimly surmise, or feebly hope, or cannot realize at all, he sees and hears and knows. All the powers of his soul are aroused to proclaim them. He becomes a poet and an orator, made so by vivid realization and burning zeal. With Oriental imagination he paints his thoughts

¹ Ps. xxxii. 4.² Jer. xx. 9.³ Amos iii. 8.

as outward realities. He gets his message not from any book, though his general principles of truth and righteousness may be contained in many books; but truths as old as the hills have been specially revealed unto him, and are applied by him to the circumstances in which he lives. In most cases nothing essentially new has been revealed; but what he already knew has been made luminous and real, and by spiritual discernment he sees the plans and purposes of God. Such sight is foresight and insight and throughsight (*Durchsicht*). He sees through events to a logical and historical outcome.

The original idea of prophecy needs to be more clearly defined. It has grown to be synonymous with prediction, as though this were its principal element. The foretelling of future events is a subordinate and unessential part of the prophetic office. Many of the prophecies recorded in the Bible contain no prediction. There are, to be sure, prophecies that have the predictive element, but they are not so numerous as has been supposed.

Some portions of Scripture that are prophetic in form are historical in fact. A strained effort has been made by many exegetes to discover the New Testament in the Old; to see in every prominent person a type, in every act a symbol, in every prophecy a prediction, concerning Christ and his kingdom. The cross has been seen by fanciful interpreters in the tree of life, in the rod of Moses, and in his outstretched arms upheld by Aaron and Hur. The whole gospel has been drawn out of the saying concerning the "seed of the woman." The doctrine of the Trinity has been found in certain plural forms in the first chapter of Genesis, and in the Trisagion of Isaiah. The scarlet cord of Rahab has been twisted into the redeeming blood of Christ. Even Samson has served the purpose of Messianic prophecy. The warrior from Edom, with garments dyed in the blood of slain enemies, has been made a type of Christ pouring out his own blood for his enemies. The history of the whole world has been drawn out of the prophecies

of Ezekiel and Daniel, and they have been made to foretell things they never dreamed of. Immediate events discerned by the signs of the times have been projected into the far distance. Historical allusions in the New Testament, forced by rabbinical methods of interpretation into parallelism with events in the lives of Christ and the apostles, have furnished the basis of arguments drawn from fulfilment of prediction.

A passage from Rev. F. W. Robertson further illustrates this false method of interpretation. He says that Scripture "is full of Christ, but not in the way that some suppose; for there is nothing more miserable, as specimens of perverted ingenuity, than the attempts of certain commentators and preachers to find remote and recondite and intended allusions to Christ everywhere. For example, they chance to find in the construction of the temple the fusion of two metals, and this they conceive is meant to show the union of Divinity with Humanity in Christ. If they read of coverings to the tabernacle,

they find implied the doctrine of imputed righteousness. If it chance that one of the curtains of the tabernacle be red, they see in that a prophecy of the blood of Christ. If they are told that the kingdom of heaven is a pearl of great price, they will see in it the allusion,—that, as a pearl is the production of animal suffering, so the kingdom of heaven is produced by the sufferings of the Redeemer. I mention this perverted mode of comment, because it is not merely harmless, idle, and useless; it is positively dangerous. This is to make the Holy Spirit speak riddles and conundrums, and the interpretation of Scripture but clever riddle-guessing.”¹

All this has tended to belittle prophecy, and obscure its real import. We have, perhaps, been deceived by the word itself, as though the *pro* in composition indicated a *foretelling* of future events. It would be better to give it a vicarious force. The prophet is one who speaks *for* God. He is a messenger sent

¹ Sermon on Inspiration.

to announce the divine will. He is one who "bubbles over" with the truth which has been poured into his religious consciousness. As Aaron was appointed to be the *nabi*¹ of Moses, to speak in his stead, so the prophet is God's "spokesman." Moses is called a prophet, as being a mediator between God and his people, receiving the message from God in holy communion upon the mount or in the tabernacle, and announcing it in the public assembly. The promise was that a prophet like unto himself² should never be wanting to a faithful, obedient people; that Moses should have an unbroken line of successors. It was only in times of apostasy and of national neglect of Jehovah that it was said "there was no open vision"³ or prophetic communication. Then men "ran to and fro to seek the word of the Lord,"⁴ and did not find it. This truth, that God dwells with those who obey him, and communicates with them by means of inspired

¹ Exod. iv. 16.

² Deut. xviii. 15, 18.

³ 1 Sam. iii. 1.

⁴ Amos viii. 12.

messengers, was expressed in a proverbial saying: "Where there is no vision, the people cast off restraint."¹

It is too much the habit of thought, even in the Christian church, to associate the gift of prophecy with a few miraculously endowed persons of long ages past, who sufficiently revealed for all time the plans and will of God, and to suppose that the prophetic order has long since disappeared. A thoughtful glance at a few well-known passages of Scripture refutes this notion. The essentially universal character of the gift of prophecy is shown in one of the earliest allusions to it. By the command of the Lord, Moses had chosen seventy elders to assist in the administration of government. All but two of these came to the tabernacle without the camp; and the Lord took of the Spirit that was upon Moses, and put it upon them, and they did prophesy. Eldad and Medad, the two absent ones, felt at the same moment the prophetic impulse, and began to speak, as the Spirit

¹ Prov. xxix. 18.

gave them utterance, the language of a new, strange, joyous religious experience, the burden of which was doubtless praise unto God, if we are to judge by many later prophetic utterances. A young man, zealous for religious proprieties, ran and told Moses; and Joshua, thinking that his leader might wish to have a monopoly of the prophetic gift, exclaimed, "My Lord Moses, forbid them!" The reply of Moses showed him to be so fully possessed of the true spirit of prophecy that he had nothing to fear from any rivals. "Enviest thou for my sake? Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his Spirit upon them."¹ That utterance contains the very gist of prophecy. Its liberality of sentiment, the breadth and spirituality of the conception, the fervency of desire, and the glimpse of what might be hoped for in the future, reveal that the Spirit of the Lord was certainly upon Moses, and had not at all been diminished by being shared with the seventy. It mat-

¹ Num. xi. 29.

ters not for our present purpose whether this narrative be taken as strictly and literally historical, or whether it be the product of a later age, founded on tradition. It expresses in either case an early view of the nature of prophecy. It is the result of the outpouring of the Spirit of the Lord. It is not necessarily predictive, except as every fresh manifestation of God awakens ardent longings and glorious hopes of still better things to come; and it may be shared by all who are truly the people of God.

Centuries rolled away. The idea and scope of prophecy and the number of the prophets had been greatly enlarged. The message of God had come more and more clearly to the religious consciousness. Ecstatic emotions had become more subordinated to clear perceptions of divine truth and righteousness. Oracular responses by means of the mysterious *urim* and *thummim* had been entirely discarded. Schools of the prophets had been established. From all classes of society God had selected men, and women too, to go out among the people and

speak for him. Joel perceived the tendency and the need of the prophetic spirit, and voiced the prayer of Moses as the utterance of his own expectant faith. "It shall come to pass that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions, and also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my Spirit."¹ Here, too, it is seen that God is no respecter of persons in the bestowment of prophetic gifts. All may and should become prophets. Even the slaves, male and female, may be filled with the Spirit, who shall by dreams, visions, and holy communings inspire them to the utterance of divine truth.

Other centuries elapsed, and Moses' prayer and Joel's expectation begin to be fulfilled. The Spirit of prophecy is outpoured first in the upper room, and upon the three thousand converts of Pentecost; then upon the household of Cornelius, as a proof that all God's

¹ Joel ii. 28, 29.

gifts are offered to the whole world; then upon the converts at Ephesus, who had known only John's baptism, and had not before apprehended their full privilege as believers in Christ; and in fact upon the church at large. All did prophesy. The Corinthian church came behind no other in any spiritual gift, yet they were exhorted to desire earnestly that they might prophesy rather than possess miraculous gifts of healing or of tongues. These new gifts were not to supersede the old. The prophetic order was rather to be enlarged, and to continue down to the end of time. Pentecost was but the beginning of a new dispensation, which is yet not entirely new, but makes the exceptional gifts of the old dispensation the common privilege of all Christian believers. In this all the Lord's people are called to be prophets; and as the growing burden of prophetic utterances then was the coming of the Messiah, so now the very soul of prophecy continues to be the testimony concerning Jesus.¹

¹ Rev. xix. 10.

II.

THE PROPHETIC CALL AND CHARACTER.

IT is noteworthy how as we rise in the scale of prophecy one by one the concomitants of the older and lower stages fall away. Ephod and teraphim are consigned to the owls and to the bats. The links which connected prophecy with mantic disappear. Every kind of physical stimulus is discarded. The prophet no longer seeks to work himself up into a state of physical excitement in order to court revelation. . . . The hand of God may be heavy upon them, but yet they do not lose their full personality. Instead of being mere passive instruments their intelligence is active. They are not a mere flute or lyre for the Spirit to blow through ; or, if they are, there is a fine quality of tone which belongs to the reed or to the strings. The impulse is given, and all the faculties and powers of the man are stirred to unwonted energy, in which however, as if to give it the stamp of nature and reality, there mingles something of his weakness as well as of his strength. The prophets are above all things impassioned seers of spiritual truth and preachers of religion.

PROFESSOR W. SANDAY.

II.

THE PROPHETIC CALL AND CHARACTER.

To the purified soul of Isaiah the air seemed filled with divine voices calling for messengers. "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" He did not first receive a call to the prophetic office, and then determine whether or not he would be obedient to it. Rather, having already the spirit of obedience, waiting upon God in his temple, he saw the vision and heard the call. God had been a long time there, and always calling for helpers. He has been calling ever since, and one need not go to Jerusalem to see and hear him. The Macedonian cry, "Come over and help us," is the echo of the voice divine, and may be heard on every breeze. Paul, too, got his commission to preach the gospel to the Gentiles after he had exclaimed "What wilt thou have me to do?" A complete willingness to go anywhere

and to do anything for God and humanity, so that duty and privilege become one, is the prime condition of rightly interpreting God's will concerning us. It was their worshipful spirit, their trustful allegiance to God, their great love for his people, that made the Hebrew prophets so receptive of divine impressions.

God is calling unto everybody to make this world happier and better, to save it from the twin evils of sin and ignorance that afflict mankind. How and where he can best assist in this work is the problem for every consecrated soul to solve under the guidance of Providence and in the light of reason. Whatever may be his avocation, his *vocation* is the service of humanity; and in pursuit of that he will find frequent opportunities to speak for God, to be a true prophet. The pressing need of the church and world is a great company of such minor prophets or lay preachers. A mistake too often made is that a call to prophesy or preach imposes as a duty the cessation of all other employments. It is necessary only

to subordinate all other employments, and make them contributory to the one great purpose of life. Paul was a lay preacher, ordained by no human authority, who worked at his trade of tent-making or preached the gospel, according to the need of the hour.

A call to the prophetic office or to the Christian ministry does not differ essentially from a general call to the service of God and humanity. God sets before his servants many an open door of usefulness. It is safe to enter the nearest one. The present duty is the thing at hand that needs to be done. He who passes by an opportunity to do good in order to find a better one, will search in vain. It is the busy workman who gets called to higher service. Whoever is convinced that he can accomplish most good in the Christian ministry, is plainly called to attempt such work, first having fitted himself for it. The results will determine whether or not he was mistaken in his conviction. This will prove a far safer rule to follow than an impression that one must preach regardless of results.

Christ's apostles were chosen and sent forth for the purpose of bringing forth much fruit. God calls men to success, and not to failure. It must be remembered, however, that present apparent failure may be the necessary condition of larger future success. But if the present line of conduct is not surely tending toward the accomplishment of the work in hand, if we have not good reasons for expecting ultimate victory, the sooner we change our course the better. We cannot fall back upon any supposed call, and continue a profitless undertaking. This amounts to saying that God guides men by enlightened reason rather than by impressions.

It matters little whether the call to the prophetic office be accompanied by some strange experience of vision, dream, or trance. The essence of the call consists in a profound conviction that such is God's will. It matters not whether this conviction be wrought gradually or suddenly. The main thing is to have it, not as a remembrance of the past, but as an ever-abiding and constantly intensified reality.

It should grow with prayer, self-examination, and study of the truth to be proclaimed. Not many have heard, like Paul, a voice from heaven calling them to the ministry; but all may feel as deeply as he the sense of moral obligation expressed in his, "Woe is me if I preach not the gospel." Few have seen a vision like that of Isaiah in the temple. No live coal has touched their lips; but the Holy Ghost has touched the hearts of many, and constrained them to say, "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach good tidings." It is well to have the anointing of woe as well as that of gladness. The conviction of duty may abide when the impulsive joy has subsided. The good tidings may not always be received as such; and the modern prophet may sometimes feel like fleeing into the desert, and sheltering himself under a juniper-tree. Then the still, small voice of conscience must drive him back to proclaim again, and with increased earnestness, the message of the Lord.

It has been truthfully said that no Hebrew

prophet of note was the product of the prophetical schools ; and this has been used as an argument against theological schools. Too common have been the invectives against manufactured or man-made ministers. It is true that God now, as in ancient days, sometimes lays his hand upon an Elisha at the plough, or an Amos tending his flocks and gathering sycamore fruit, as well as upon a cultured Isaiah at court, or a theologically trained Ezekiel in the office of the priest. Still, the spirit of prophecy may drive one first to the schools as it drove Paul into Arabia. It must not be forgotten, too, that the preacher of our times must be, like John the Baptist, more than a prophet. He must be also pastor, and "apt to teach." Three years of devout meditation upon the message to be delivered ought not to diminish, but rather to intensify, the conviction of a special call to the prophetic office ; and he who enters a theological school with the feeling that he is called to preach, and goes out uncertain about it, has either been made a good deal wiser, or has failed to utilize his oppor-

tunities. Here is the place to try the spirits, whether they be of God, to drive out selfish ambition, love of authority, itching for applause, desire for social position and increased salary, or even laziness, that with other kindred spirits of the pit is urging some young gentlemen into the ministry. There were such false prophets even before the school of Samuel was established; and afterward not all those who prophesied smooth things, and to "eat bread" by their profession, came from the prophetical schools. The bread-and-butter prophets are older than the time of Amos, and their order has never died out. They have been powerless imitators of those who have been truly called of God. The professional prophets have in various ages ceased more and more to receive and deliver the word of the Lord, and so God has gone out of the schools to find where he could men who would speak for him. Amos revived the old idea of prophecy. The prophet of the wilderness was a rebuke to all the doctors of law and divinity. Galilean fishermen were called to do the work that properly be-

longed to priests and scribes. St. Francis organized his great band of mendicant friars to supply the preaching which the clergy of the schools failed to give. The lay preachers of early Methodism were true prophets of God, anointed with the Spirit to deliver the message which the ordained graduates of the universities were failing to deliver. The clergy of to-day need to examine and arouse themselves to a realization of the greatness of their vocation, lest the less cultured preachers of the Salvation Army shall, by greater zeal, devotion, and success, prove the former to be prophets self-called. The tendency of the schools has always been to stimulate intellectual pride, and to emphasize dogma more than experimental religion. We are not to conclude that God prefers ignorant or uncultured men as his messengers to the people. Moses, Samuel, Isaiah, Paul, and all the greatest prophets since, have been trained in schools, and were leaders in scholarship. One such man is often worth a score of uncultured geniuses, however baptized with the Spirit. We should only be watchful

lest the theological school spoil the prophets in embryo, or attract men of mercenary spirit.

We can readily imagine a conscientious young man who enters a theological school uncertain about his call to the Christian ministry, but with a desire to learn the truth and to do God's will. Inasmuch as the gift of prophecy is to be "desired," or sought earnestly, he seeks by prayer and study to gain it. Association with others, supposed to have been called of God to preach, modifies his previous notions of what constitutes a call. The broadening horizon of truth and enlarged views of the needs of humanity expand his conception of the greatness and responsibility of the ministerial office. As the office grows greater he grows smaller, and cries out, "Who is sufficient for these things?" Meanwhile, prayer and meditation have inflamed his love for humanity. He sees nothing else than the Christian ministry worth living for, though it may once have appeared to him very repulsive. His occasional efforts in the pulpit seem to be accompanied by spir-

itual blessings to the hearers. At last faith triumphs over doubts and uncertainties, and he exclaims, "Our sufficiency is of God, who by his providence and Spirit hath made us to be able ministers of the New Testament." In this spirit he enters upon the duties of the ministerial office. Is he not a prophet called of God as much as those who have seen visions and dreamed dreams? The subsequent life must give the final answer.

God's call for messengers has been misinterpreted by some. Feeling a holy impulse to win souls for Christ, they leap at once to the conclusion that they must have a pastorate, and repeat from Sunday to Sunday the one message, the offer of salvation to sinners. As this can be done with very little study, they feel at once qualified for the work of the ministry. Such may be evangelists in the broad sense of the word, announcing glad tidings privately or publicly as occasion may offer. Pastors, teachers, edifiers of the church, they cannot be. It is folly, if not sin, for any one to attempt to address the same audience

year after year, or even for one year, unless he has well prepared himself to do so. The shepherd is not to fleece, but to feed, the flock. He should feel ashamed and condemned in attempting to minister to his congregation unless he has studied to show himself approved. As a religious teacher he ought to be in educational ability and acquirements as much superior to his audience as the professor in the schools is superior to the pupils therein. The need of itinerant evangelists, who can go rapidly from place to place and powerfully proclaim their one message to the people, is as great now as ever. When a successful evangelist becomes a settled pastor, he is often sadly out of place. He finds himself unqualified for his office. His need is a broader education, and he must get it in some way. As a messenger he can announce only what he himself has learned ; for God will not continue to speak through lazy and incompetent heralds. A few are capable of self-culture, and make themselves leaders in thought and religious instructors by digging for wisdom as for hid

treasure. It is difficult to conceive how one can be filled with the spirit of truth without being in some degree a progressive student. The vast majority of preachers must seek a thorough preparation before entering upon the duties of the ministerial office. Otherwise they are likely to be tiresome repeaters of commonplace and hortatory remarks.

The preacher, like the prophet, must be a "man of God." Better than to be able to point to a definite time in the past, when by vision, dream, ecstatic trance, or having seen the Lord, he was chosen for the work of the ministry, is it to realize daily that God's Spirit dwells within him, giving divine impulse to prophetic thought and speech. Thus his whole conversation and deportment will stamp him as a man called and commissioned of God to a special life-work. He has an ever-increasing realization of the magnitude, power, and dignity of his office. The truths that well up in his soul, and find utterance from time to time, have a reflex influence upon himself, and develop seriousness, moral earnestness, and in-

tensity of religious conviction. No trifler or jester can be a prophet. A prophet is a good deal more than a story-teller, whether in the pulpit or out. The realities of the eternal world, which he is called to declare, force him to much prayer, meditation, and communion with God; and, being much with God, something of divinity will attach to him, and make men who come into contact with him feel that they are in the presence of one of God's ambassadors. The common people used to shrink back half in awe from Dante, and point to him in the streets as the man who had come back from Inferno. His great theme, no less than the trials of his life, gave him a solemn aspect as of an inhabitant of another world. And truly our citizenship is in heaven, and we are messengers of the Most High. How can we exchange so readily the serious aspect and the solemn utterances of the pulpit for the jovial manner and small talk of society? Immeasurably worse is it if we try to entertain our audiences with jocose anecdotes, laughable turns of wit, and pleasing thought,

which serve to give the preacher a reputation for being brilliant and sharp, but never weighty and powerful. A brilliant, sharp, entertaining, and popular prophet! Is any incongruity seen in these terms? A man of God, and a jolly good fellow! Are these associate ideas? Don't cry out, "Asceticism!" A merry disposition may be sanctified without being destroyed. Brilliant wit may be used for God's glory in the furtherance of holy causes. There comes to mind the reply of a quaint preacher who was rebuked for levity, "Brother, if the Lord had given you any wit, wouldn't you use it?" Yes, use it; but do not abuse it. Let it be the ornamental fringe of conversation and discourse. "Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man."

It is true that the jovial preacher, light-hearted, talkative, who has a joke or a witticism for all, and is regarded as companionable by the worldly, is somewhat in demand. Verily he has his reward, and is not altogether

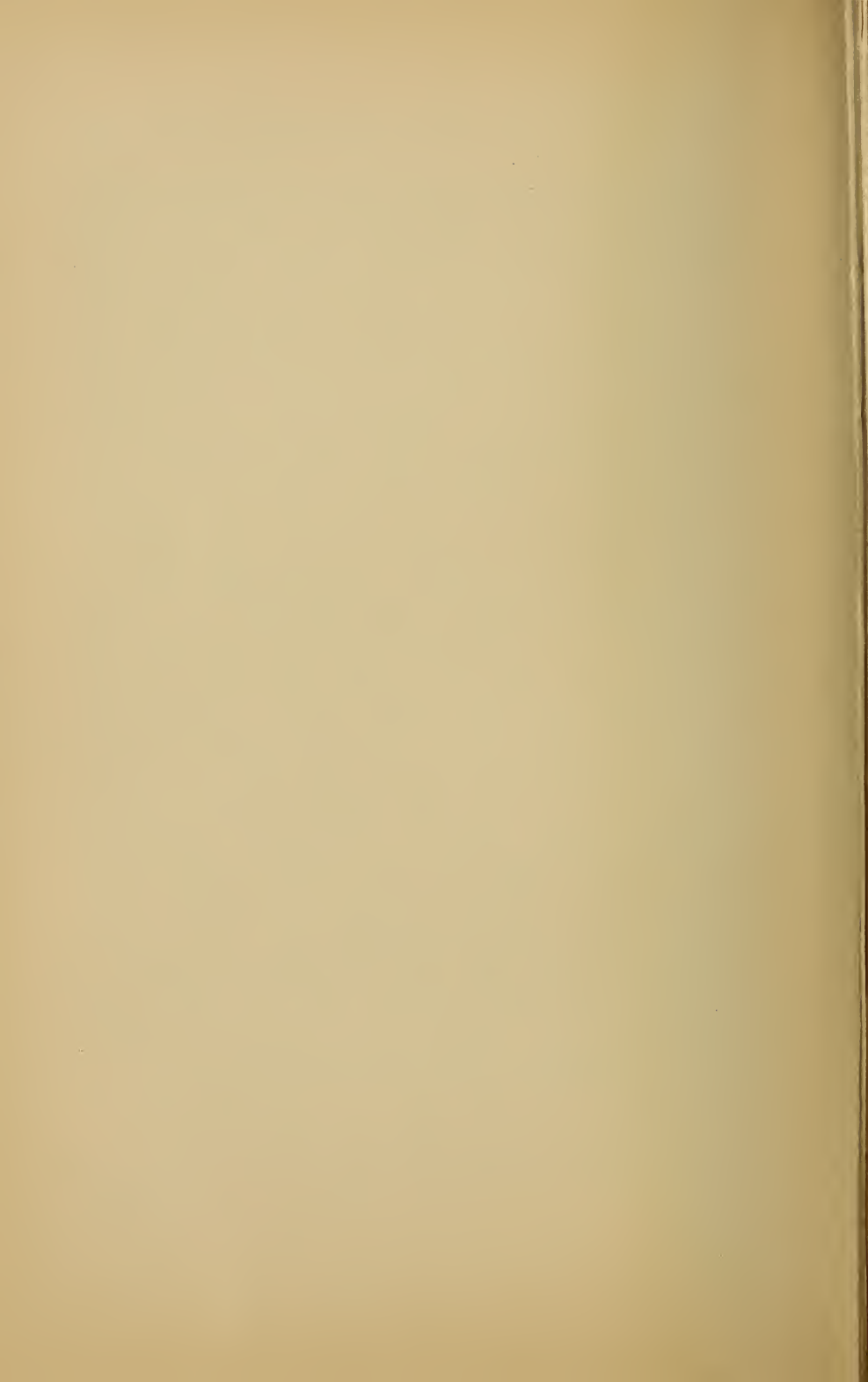
useless. Our theme, however, is the preacher as prophet, not as popular lecturer or leader of a religious club.

What is it that makes the truth powerful? Is there something in its own inherent nature that convinces and persuades? This seems to be the thought that underlies the old proverb, '*magna est veritas et prævalebit*. But it is doubtful if truth left to itself be as powerful in this world as error. With pure souls it doubtless has great weight. To know it is to love and practise it. But sinful men love darkness rather than light. Many prefer to believe a lie. The god of this world hath blinded their eyes. Bigotry and superstition dread a new idea more than anything else. With such the truth must be supported by a great personality to give it any force, and it has as much authority as the person who utters it. The ward politician may sometimes stumble upon a great political maxim, but nobody pays any attention to it. Let a Gladstone utter the same words, and the world recognizes their profundity and value.

An obscure preacher may sometimes exhibit polished gems of thought, but nobody perceives their brilliancy. Let some high dignitary of the church say the same things and all applaud. It makes a vast difference who utters the truth. Station, reputation, authority, give weight to the utterance. Moral truth must be backed by character, and the truths of religion must be re-enforced by the power of the Holy Spirit. No human personality has power enough to convict and persuade the sinner. He must be made to feel that back of the truth uttered is the person and authority of God. The utterance and the life of the preacher must be of such a character as to carry the conviction that he is an ambassador from heaven. Then sinners tremble, as Ahab before Elijah, Herod before the Baptist, and Felix before Paul. To be truly successful the preacher must have God enthroned within. When the Comforter has come unto you he will convince the world through you of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment.

In the earliest accounts of Hebrew prophecy there is a picture of a country youth approaching the "hill of God," where there is a school of the prophets. There meet him a company with instruments of music and songs of praise. Their prophetic spirit seems to be contagious. The youth catches their enthusiasm. The Spirit of the Lord comes upon him, and he is "turned into another man." He also begins to prophesy, much to the astonishment of the hearers. A change identical in character with this is not now desirable, for this youth acted a good deal like one hypnotized or temporarily insane.¹ Yet it were well if in every place of sacred learning there were a contagious, enthusiastic, joyous, religious spirit that would transform every youth who enters it. Thus there would go out into the Christian ministry a "band of men whose hearts God has touched."

¹ I Sam. x. 5-13. Cf. xix. 23, 24.



III.

THE PROPHETIC MESSAGE.

WE have to face the truism, the neglected truism, that every living preacher must receive a communication direct from God. This is in the last resort the only justification of preaching at all. . . . No man taketh this honor to himself. To be God's mouthpiece when God is not speaking through him is a fraud of the palpable kind which men will not away with. . . . All manner of sins may be forgiven a preacher, — a harsh voice, a clumsy delivery, a bad pronunciation, an insufficient scholarship, a crude doctrine, an ignorance of men ; but there is one defect which cannot be forgiven, for it is a kind of blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, — it cannot be forgiven him if he preaches when he has not received a message from God to deliver. Woe unto those prophets whom the Lord hath not sent !

REV. ROBERT F. HORTON.

III.

THE PROPHETIC MESSAGE.

THE modern prophet, like the ancient, must receive not only his call, but also his message, directly from God. This would appear self-evident, for God surely cannot call a messenger to speak for him without giving him something to say. It is strange that the church has emphasized so much the special divine call, and insisted so little upon every preacher's having a message directly committed to him by God. Doubtless this neglect has arisen from the assumption that God has given his full and complete message to the world in an inspired book, and that his messenger is to utter nothing more nor less than what he finds written therein. It may be that a misinterpretation of the closing words of the New Testament Apocalypse has helped to confirm this assumption, "If any man shall add

unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book : and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.”¹ It is evident that this passage has no reference to the New Testament canon ; for it had not been formed, and a large part of it had probably not been written. The words cited can mean nothing more than a caution concerning the use of the Apocalypse itself. Some suppose that they refer to the prophecies contained in the “little book,” of chapter x. 2, 8, 9.

As a record of God’s progressive revelation of himself and of his will concerning us, the Bible is for us *par excellence* the word of God.²

¹ Rev. xxii. 18, 19.

² “Applied to the Bible as a whole, the expression, ‘Word of God,’ seems to savor of the old theory of inspiration, which no one now cares to maintain, according to which the Holy Ghost dictated to the biblical writers the very terms which they were to use; it seemed to place every part of the Bible upon precisely the same spiritual level; it seems to imply an abso-

This does not exclude other revelations. It necessarily presupposes other revelations which must have been given before a record of them could have been made. God has spoken in many ways. As the work necessarily reveals the workman, so "the heavens declare the glory of God;" and "the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead."¹ Messages concerning him were read by Job and the Psalmist in the starry skies. We are not merely to accept their statements concerning God as he was revealed to them in his works; but using their words as guideboards, we ourselves should look into

luteness, a finality, a perfection, which, as the instances that I have referred to sufficiently show, do not inhere in every particular statement which Scripture contains. No doubt the term could be so defined as to make it coextensive with the whole Bible; but there would always be the danger of the technical definition being forgotten, and the popular acceptance being substituted for it. And it should be carefully remembered that this use of the term is not biblical." — PROFESSOR DRIVER'S "Sermons on the Old Testament," p. 158 f.

¹ Rom. i. 20.

the heavens, and examine as fully as we can God's works, so as to find their revelations of the Creator confirmed and enlarged. Thus the word of the Lord comes unto us. On the written page it may be to us only an abstract statement whose meaning we do not know. The prophets saw a message of God in the past and on-going events of history. His will and plan and moral government were thereby discerned. We are not merely to accept on authority their conclusions ; but we are to judge all subsequent and present history in the light of their revelations, in order that we, too, may see God's hand in national affairs. The prophets give us a clew to the philosophy of history. We may follow that clew out to a rational system. Thus clearer revelations come to us, and again we have a "Thus saith the Lord" in our own souls. The prophets heard his voice especially in the approval and condemnation of conscience, and were thus impelled to administer rebuke to sin. Unless our consciences are seared as with a hot iron, we hear the same divine voice in us, and recognize that the reve-

lations of Scripture pertaining to morals are not true merely because they are in the Bible, but they are in the Bible because they are true. Thus a progressive moral revelation is still going on. The word of the Lord is coming unto us. God spoke to the prophets in mighty convictions, hopes, longings, and expectations. Their confidence in God led them to exclaim, "It shall come to pass. It must be so!" With the same inspirations in our souls we know as well as Paul, and not merely because he said it, that all things are working together for our good, and that "if this earthly house of our tabernacle be dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." All these revelations are not new to us, but confirmations of the old; and it was much the same with them, for truth is as old as eternity. It is the realization of truth that constitutes the genuine revelation. Before that our eyes are blinded, and with an open Bible before us God may be as unrevealed to us as he is in nature to the idolatrous heathen.

It is very important to get the original meaning of "the word of the Lord" firmly fixed in mind. It came to Moses, Samuel, and the prophets in general, as a direct inspiration. In the beginning they had no sacred book or books to refer to, and there is no evidence that any Hebrew prophet got his message from previous prophets and inspired historians. It is only in later times, after prophecy had almost ceased, that a canon of written laws and prophecies was deemed necessary. Appeal was made to a living prophet rather than to a written word. The knowledge of former divine revelations was gained largely by oral tradition. Few had copies of the sacred writings. After the Babylonian exile copies of the collected canon were multiplied, and gradually gained for themselves more and more reverence. They became the "word of the Lord." It is the written word that Psalm cxix. extols, but the prophets do not have this in mind. They were able to say, "Thus saith the Lord unto me." They had something special to say to the people

of their times, to call them back from sin to righteousness, and from idolatry to the service of the living God; to rebuke the wickedness of rulers, and fasten moral responsibility where it belonged; to encourage the people in time of national distress, to comfort them in captivity, and to inspire them with the hope of a great Deliverer. These harangues, denunciations, rebukes, instructions, and encouragements delivered by "open-air journalists," were afterward interwoven with history, and committed to writing, either by the prophets themselves, or by others of a later time. They will always serve as guides and illustrations of the spirit and substance of prophecy. The reason why they are valuable to us "for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction" is, that God and the principles of his moral government are the same in all ages. God in us confirms the truths of Scripture. The facts of sacred history, as well as its parables and legends, are illustrations to make those truths real and powerful. Criticism may modify our interpretation of the illustrations; truth remains the same forever.

It is inconceivable that the modern prophet is called of God to repeat only what original prophets said thousands of years ago, and endeavor to show how God in speaking to the Israelites gave special messages to us also, or how the prophets uttered dark sayings to the people of their times designed only for us upon whom the ends of the earth have come. The prophets spoke to their own generation, and we must speak to ours. The times have changed. There has been some progress in revelation. God's truth has been unfolded, "in many parts and in diverse manners," in recent times also. We are learning to read his revelation in the works of his hands, in the great ethnic religions, in the onward march of history, more clearly than in special providential events; in the consensus of the world's best and greatest thinkers, even better than in special subjective impressions of the spirit; and most of all in the better understood person and office-work of his only begotten Son.

A word is an expression of a thought. In whatever way God may communicate his

thoughts to men, such communication is his word. We are not to think of a visible presence, nor of an audible voice. No man hath seen God at any time. It is enough if his message is felt in the soul with the force of indubitable conviction. God's greatest revelation of himself and of truth is in the person of his Son, who is therefore fitly called the Word. "The word of the Lord," which came from time to time to Old Testament prophets, is never spoken of as coming to the apostles and New Testament writers, since "the word of God" has come to all. The change in phraseology is noticeable. God's full message of grace concerning salvation has found its expression in the unspeakable gift of his Son. It is not necessary nor possible that he should add anything more. Throughout the New Testament "the word of God" means not a written revelation, but God's message of salvation in Jesus Christ orally proclaimed by anointed ambassadors. When Jesus prayed, "Sanctify them through the truth; thy word is truth," he referred to the message which

he had delivered, and not to the Old Testament. This the context plainly shows. This was the "word" which the persecuted Christians went everywhere preaching.¹ This was the "word of his grace" able to build up the Ephesian Church.² This "word of God," vitalized in the experience of believers, became the sword of the Spirit, living, powerful, and a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.³ Christ is the touchstone of character. He is the living word that surpasses all other revelations.

Certainly the words that fell from the lips of Jesus may be called God's message to the world in a superlative sense; yet in all the Epistles of Paul,⁴ Peter, John, James, and Jude no saying of Jesus is quoted. In the Acts of the Apostles, Luke records several epito-

¹ Acts viii. 4. ² Acts xx. 22. ³ Eph. vi. 17; Heb. iv. 12.

⁴ As exceptions to this statement might be cited 2 Cor. xii. 9, where Paul gives the words of Christ in answer to prayer, "My grace is sufficient for thee," etc., and 1 Cor. xi. 23 ff., the institution of the Lord's Supper. In the former case wise interpretation might claim nothing more than a subjective impression of thought, which the apostle shaped in his own

mized sermons and addresses of Peter, Stephen, and Paul. They contain only one precious utterance of Jesus, — “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” Throughout the Gospels, and in the Fourth Gospel especially, it is often difficult to determine what are the words of Jesus, and what are the comments of the Evangelists. These facts show what small estimate was put upon mere words by the sacred writers, how little they thought of verbal inspiration. It was enough for them to have “the mind of Christ,” and so to reproduce in their own language the substance of his teaching. If the things spoken by Jesus were brought to their remembrance by the Comforter, they were expressed in Greek rather than in Aramaic; and so we have but few precise utterances of our Saviour, those where the Aramaic has been preserved.¹ No

words; in the latter, a comparison with Luke’s Gospel might lead to the conclusion that both writers received the account “of the Lord” through tradition. The phraseology differs so much from that of Mark and Matthew that evidently the exact words of Christ are not given in any of the narratives.

¹ e.g., Mark v. 41; Matt. xxvii. 46.

one need lament this. There can be no reasonable doubt that we have the substance of the teaching of Jesus; and we, too, can have "the mind of Christ" so as to interpret to others his message to the world. We preach him. He is the message. It has been well said that Christ came not so much to preach the gospel, as that there might be a gospel to be preached.

The Pharisees in the time of Christ had the Old Testament canon. They searched it, and applied to it the most minute exegesis. With the most rigid dogmatism they declared it to be God's word, every jot and tittle of which was precious. Yet at the same time that they almost worshipped a written word, the real, consummate, incarnate Word of God they rejected and crucified. They rested in the deadness of the letter that killeth; for whatever is dead produceth death. Eternal life flows from the living Word. It is received by means of the truth vitalized by the Holy Spirit. Something of the pharisaical spirit still lingers. Many are exceedingly

zealous of the traditions of the Fathers. They are more careful to defend some antiquated dogma concerning the Bible, and to insist on the absolute authority of the letter, than to be filled with the gentle, charitable Spirit of Christ, and to have a living message of God burning in their souls. They are blind to on-going revelations, and so unable to interpret the old.

It may be said that if much in the Old Testament has decayed and is ready to vanish away, it is only that its essential truths may reappear in new light; and this is true. They shine forth in all brilliancy in Him who is the Light of the world. But here, too, the revelation given in him and by him nineteen centuries ago is not enough to furnish the preacher his theme. He is to preach something more than a Christ historically portrayed by the first three Gospels or a Christ theologically conceived by Paul and John. He has not any real message yet, till the Comforter has taken the things of Christ and shown them unto him. When Christ has been revealed

unto him personally as "a Prince and a Saviour," then he can say with the apostles, "We are witnesses of these things."¹ From such revelation by the Spirit he must deduce his own system of theology, if he ever has one worth anything to himself or to anybody else, helped, to be sure, by all the teachings of the past. He must have, like Paul, something that he can call, "My Gospel." Foremost by a long distance among all helps to a knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus must ever be the New Testament, and after that the Old; yet if these be studied simply as inspired histories, or as records of divine utterances completed and sealed up in the past, the preacher will not find his full message therein. The prophets of the early church did not pursue this method. They had no New Testament, and many converted from the Gentile world were ignorant of the Old; but they had a burning message of truth and righteousness, and of a Saviour personally revealed in them. Preach-

¹ Acts v. 31, 32.

ing to the Jews, they grounded their arguments upon admitted truths of the Old Testament; preaching to the Gentiles, they appealed only to the revelations made in nature and in conscience.

Just as we never really learn righteousness by reading works on ethics, inspired or un-inspired, but, aided by these, we examine our own hearts and consciences to learn what God has revealed in us, so helped by all that has been written in all ages concerning Jesus the Christ, we are to seek him in our hearts, and when he has been manifested unto us as not unto the world, we are to preach him as he has been revealed unto us. The historical background is useful and necessary, but it is not the entire picture. Henceforth know we Christ no more after the flesh, but after the Spirit, as a living, spiritual presence, able to forgive sins, and to save unto the uttermost. With such a message we shall not have so much need of the theology of Wesley or of Calvin, as many have supposed. It might be well also to remem-

ber, that the apostolic church won some of its grandest victories while Paul was persecuting it. We need to be on our guard lest what we call the gospel be little more than our private and inherited biblical theology or philosophy of religion, though it may not be dignified by those names. It may be very good for the schools and for controversial purposes; but weary, discouraged, weak, and sinful men care nothing about it. They want a message from God to their souls coming straight through the preacher. They would see Jesus in some measure revealed by him.

The true prophet is a *seer*, one who sees things that others cannot see without his aid. A group of persons look out over a landscape. Some one of keener vision than the rest discerns a far distant object. By pointing it out, and describing it repeatedly, he persuades and enables others to look and see for themselves. He pieces out their eyesight with his description. They never could have discerned it till he had created for them something approaching to a mental image of it.

After all that he can say and do some will not look that way at all, declaring that the object is only in his mind's eye. So the prophets are the advanced thinkers of their age, the beholders and revealers of truth. Their testimony induces the believer to look and see for himself. It is not to be received absolutely without any testing. The seer does not create the object or the truth; he only points it out.

I receive a letter from a friend. It is a revelation of his thought. I hold it in my hand. Have I a revelation of my friend's thought? In a certain external, objective sense, yes; still, nothing is as yet revealed to me. I break the seal and try to read. It is written in an unknown language. I read, but do not understand. There is no revelation yet. An interpreter translates the letter into words that I understand. Instantly the thought of my friend flashes upon my mind. Now I have a revelation. Properly speaking, I had before only an expression of his thought, and not an impression. I know my friend

must have written that letter, not from its precise words or phraseology, for these have been changed in the translation, but from the character of the message. It not only reveals his well-known and peculiar style of thought, but it reveals him,—his character, his qualities of heart and mind. So all God has done or said is an expression of his thought and of himself. The language is strange to many. A veil is upon the heart, so that they cannot see understandingly. When the heart turns to the Lord, an Interpreter comes and takes away the veil. Then only there is a real revelation ; and when the thoughts of God are rightly interpreted, there is something in the righteous man that recognizes their divine origin. “That must be from God,” he says, “it is so like him. It bears the impress of his character. It is worthy of him alone.” He that is of God heareth God’s words.

We want no novelties in religion. Truth is old, but it needs to be renewed in every generation and in the soul of every preacher. A new statement of theology,—certainly we

need it, and every generation will need it; yet the truths essential to salvation and to holiness of life will always remain the same, though some things once thought essential may be eliminated. Some affect to scout at the idea of progress in the unfoldment and statement of religious truth, and are forever appealing unto the fathers as final arbiters, as though God could not or would not give unto the present and future generations as clear or clearer views of truth. Not anything is known till it is known in its relations. The more fully its relations are discerned and grasped, the more clearly and forcibly it is known. The truths proclaimed by the old prophets and apostles must be seen in their relations to the persons and events that now surround us before we are ready to prophesy. Then the word or message of God becomes living and powerful. We need visions not so much of the past as of the present and immediate future.

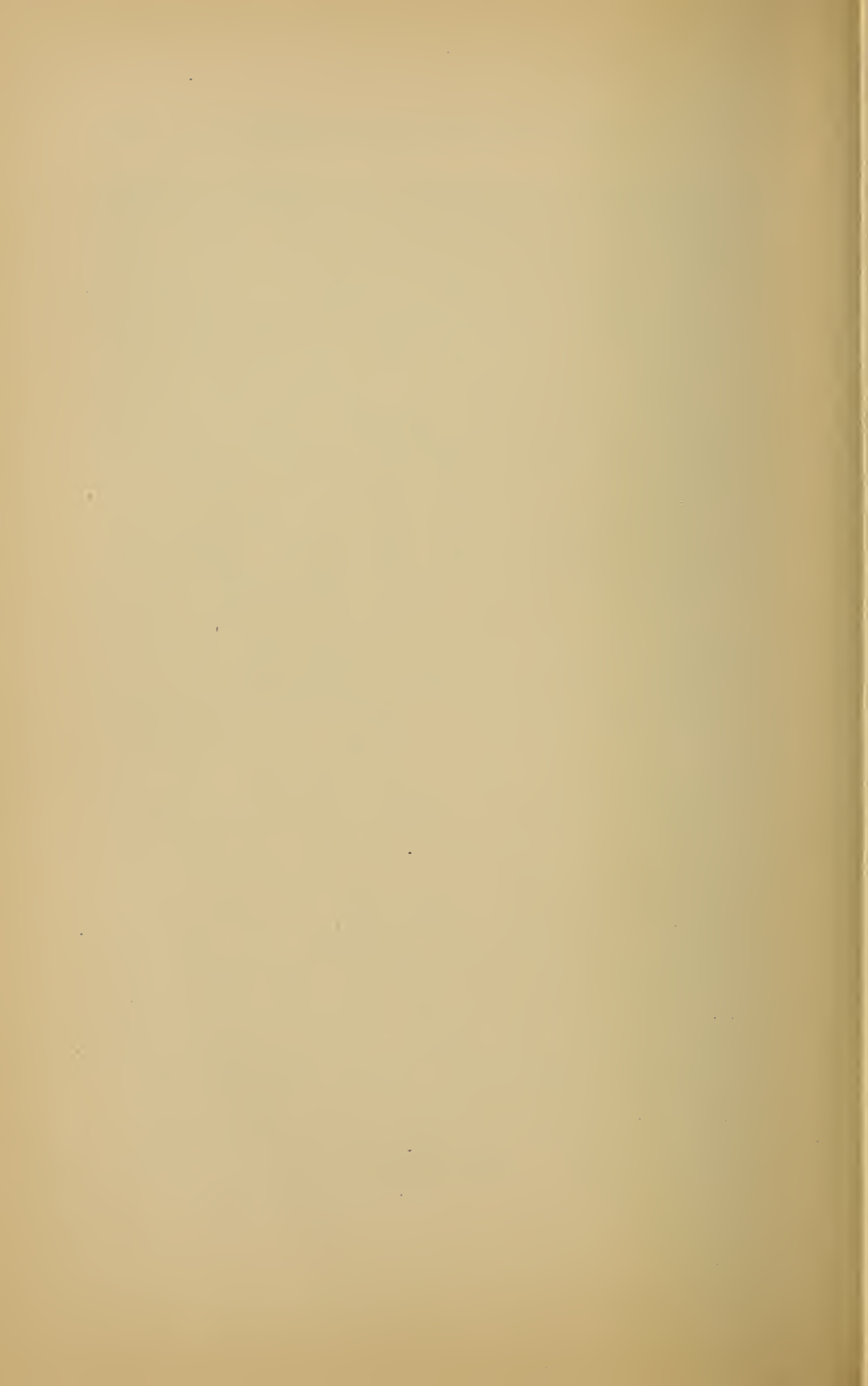
The truth must be made intensely real to the speaker before he can make it so to his

hearers. Like the revelator on Patmos, he must "see the voice" that speaks to him. Every time he enters the pulpit he should feel that God has commissioned him to say something special that day. A general commission is not enough. He must feel the hand of the Lord laid upon him frequently. Under such divine impulse what would otherwise be a commonplace remark becomes a saying of striking originality. He has added to it the weight of his own soul and the power of God working through him. No novelty of phraseology or ornamentation of rhetoric can take the place of this illuminating and energizing power within. What is irrepresible wins its way to the hearts of hearers, and sways their wills unto obedience to God. Paul asks for prayers that *utterance* may be given unto him, so that he may speak the truth boldly as he ought to speak.¹ The apostles shortly after Pentecost prayed together for the same gift.² They were not seeking for new revelations. They wanted

¹ Eph. vi. 19, 20.

² Acts iv. 29.

only boldness and power to speak God's message already well known to them. And how can we expect the same persons to listen to us a hundred times or more every year unless God's message in us is new every morning and fresh every evening? Have we not ourselves listened to many a well-worded sermon, that evinced much scholarship and some power of thought, and still gone away with the conviction that the preacher had really nothing to say? Let the preacher beware lest some hungry friend in his journey come to him, and he have nothing to set before him.



IV.

PROPHETIC INSPIRATION.

To Isaiah inspiration was nothing more nor less than the possession of certain strong moral and religious convictions, which he felt he owed to the communication of the Spirit of God, and according to which he interpreted, and even dared to foretell, the history of his people and of the world. Our study completely dispels, on the evidence of the Bible itself, that view of inspiration and prediction, so long held in the church, which it is difficult to define, but which means something like this: that the prophet beheld a vision of the future in its actual detail, and read this off as a man may read the history of the past out of a book or a clear memory. This is a very simple view, but too simple either to meet the facts of the Bible, or to afford to men any of that intellectual and spiritual satisfaction which the discovery of the Divine method is sure to afford. . . . Isaiah prophesied and predicted all he did from loyalty to two simple truths, which he tells us he received from God himself: that sin must be punished, and that the people of God must be saved. This simple faith, acting along with a wonderful knowledge of human nature and ceaseless vigilance of affairs, constituted inspiration for Isaiah.

PROFESSOR GEORGE ADAM SMITH.

IV.

PROPHETIC INSPIRATION.

AGAINST this parallel between ancient and modern prophets it may be objected that the former were immensely superior to the latter, and indeed must be classified by themselves, because they were inspired. They spoke as moved or borne along by the Holy Ghost. It is claimed that the divine message was directly communicated to them in a supernatural manner, and that they spoke or wrote as passive instruments in the hands of God, more than as agents co-operating by choice with him. A brief examination of this claim is needful.

It has always been maintained in the Protestant church that the preacher of the gospel is the successor of the Hebrew prophet rather than of the Jewish priest; and yet such a meaning has been given to inspira-

tion, and such extravagant claims have been made for the old prophets, that the Christian preacher has, in the thought of many, been as completely separated from the prophetic order as from the priesthood. Indeed, by insisting upon that outworn fiction of divinely established orders in the ministry, and by debating whether the bishopric be an order or an office, some are returning to the priestly conception of the ministry, and abandoning the prophetic. It would be better to throw aside all such traditional rubbish, and to look upon a Christian preacher as a prophet or spokesman of God, called from the ranks of the laymen, and having no more real need of ordination than the Hebrew prophets had. No one of them was ever ordained of men; each got his commission, like Paul, directly from God. The laying on of hands may be all very proper and wise as a solemn public consecration of the modern prophet to his work. It is well that a supposed call of God should be tested by the wisdom of other prophets; but the abuse of episcopal authority,

so frequent throughout the history of the church, has shown that it is quite as needful that the bishops should take their hands off, as lay them on, the candidates for the ministry. Such ordination, though sanctioned by the New Testament, is not of divine command, and notwithstanding the claim of the Roman Catholic Church confers no "character," indelible or deleble. The true preacher is just the same man after as before ordination, and belongs to the one order of Spirit-baptized Christians. He may have extraordinary gifts of nature, and a special anointing of the Spirit. There are greater and minor prophets in all ages. There are many degrees of inspiration, and some of the old prophets may have possessed it to a higher degree than any of recent times; yet in all that is essential to prophetic inspiration the Christian preacher of to-day may and should be as they were. For what is inspiration but the breathing of the Spirit of God into the conscious soul of man, energizing all his faculties, setting on fire truth already known, and thereby giving him spir-

itual insight into the nature and plans of God? Inspiration does not necessarily reveal anything new. Many of the Hebrew prophets reveal nothing before unknown. They take the facts of past and contemporaneous history as a revelation, and point out the hand of God in them. They were inspired to see the significance of those facts in the light of old truths, and thus to enlarge and modify former conceptions of God, man, and the relations between them.

One may here startle one's self by inquiring if the modern preacher may be inspired and receive revelations of truth in essentially the same manner as Isaiah and Paul. The difference is in degree rather than in kind. Every person filled with the Spirit has moments when truth dawns on him with wonderful brilliancy and power. It is a "Thus saith the Lord" to him. A proper humility and reverence may hinder him from considering himself privileged as Paul, because of a feeling that he lacks Paul's capacity, knowledge, and special mission. Yet Paul revealed but

little that is not germinally found in the Old Testament and in the words of Jesus. He points us to his own sources of information. "Be not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is. Be filled with the Spirit."¹ A little more faith and knowledge of God's ways may lead us to shorten by degrees the long distance between ourselves and the great apostle.

To be inspired certainly cannot mean anything more than to be filled with the Holy Spirit; and the New Testament declares this to be the privilege of all Christian believers with varying results. In the Jewish and in the Christian church some have been inspired to speak, some to write, and some to do. At Pentecost all who received the promise of the Father spoke "as the Spirit gave them utterance." Such inspiration was not given alone to the apostles, or to those who were to write the New Testament. It is not to be supposed that all spoke with equal power and wisdom. The idea of different degrees

¹ Eph. v. 17, 18.

of inspiration has been scouted by some, and it has been regarded as something absolute and almost mechanical. The notion once prevailed that the sacred writers were mere amanuenses, who wrote at the dictation of the Spirit, and that the voice of the prophet was only that of a trumpet produced by divine breath. There are some signs of clearer and truer conceptions. The Hebrew vowel-points, the dots of the *i*'s, and the crosses of the *t*'s, are no longer held, in cultured circles of thought, to be included among the necessary logical results of inspiration, and so are no longer accredited to the holy men of old. The advocates of verbal inspiration have quite disappeared from the ranks of biblical scholars. Some are still illogical enough to reject verbal inspiration, and to retain the theory of absolute inerrancy in the discourses and writings of the prophets and apostles, and a few reject inerrancy, and hold to verbal inspiration. If by verbal inspiration is meant that the indwelling Spirit prompted thought and utterance, and so had a suggestive

but not controlling influence upon choice of words, the claim may be allowed ; for the intimate relation of thought and language seems to necessitate this. Such inspiration, however, should not be pressed to mean anything more in the case of ancient prophets than of modern, unless the difference be in degree. In both cases the human and the divine factors must be acknowledged in the conception and in the utterance of the prophetic message. Some advocates of plenary inspiration show the looseness of their logic and the weakness of their theory by the casual admission that in a few unimportant and non-essential points absolute inerrancy of prophetic writings and of other Scripture need not be maintained ; but the easier makeshift is to refer all discrepancies and inaccuracies to careless and venturesome scribes. Not only in the utterance of such truth as pertains to godliness and eternal life, but also in incidental and illustrative allusions of a scientific nature, in historical details, in exact chronology, in ethical teaching, and in theological conceptions, inspiration, as still

held by many, makes the ancient prophet and the sacred writer absolutely inerrant. A learned professor of Hebrew under the influence of such a theory argued not long since in two columns of a religious journal that Methuselah probably died in the spring of the same year in the fall months of which occurred the universal Deluge — as though the ages of the antediluvians given in Genesis could furnish the data of exact chronology. Apparently he wanted to save Methuselah from the disgrace of having perished in the Flood.

This notion of absolute infallibility or inerrancy of the ancient prophets and sacred writers must be cast out of the concept of inspiration. It is contradicted by the Scriptures themselves, and instead of being a safeguard is a great hindrance to the progress of true Christianity, a fruitful source of infidelity. The church has been defending a foe within her own citadel. She has put the Bible as her standard of authority in the place of Christ, and subordinated reason to tradi-

tional belief. It is far better to hold that the inspired prophets and writers used the historic, scientific, and other beliefs current in their times, and under the illumination of the Spirit saw a divine meaning in them all. Parable, allegory,¹ poetry,² tradition, legend, and myth were made to serve their purposes just as well as history. The object aimed at was simply to make known and impress moral and religious truth, and any form of thought whatever they were at liberty to choose as a fitting vehicle of expression. In fact, they did what modern prophets are doing from Sunday to Sunday,—they illustrate truth from every source, and try to point out God everywhere.

There is really no reason for giving such

¹ The Book of Jonah. Cf. the interpretation of Professor Henry M. Harman in his "Introduction," pp. 399, 400. Contrast Professor Cornill's reverent appreciation of this prophecy, in his "Prophets of Israel," pp. 170-173, with the flippant attempt to "joke a little," found in Renan's "History of the People of Israel," vol. iii., pp. 417-420.

² The standing still of the sun and moon, Josh. x. 12-14. See the interpretation of Professor Milton S. Terry in "Biblical Hermeneutics," pp. 540, 541.

a definition to inspiration as to limit it to ancient times. God breathes his Spirit into the souls of chosen men in all ages. Great prophets stand out through all the Christian centuries, who have manifested a wonderful degree of it. Was not Savonarola inspired and a true prophet of God when he packed the great cathedral of Florence in the early morning hours with eager listeners, to hear him denounce wickedness and oppression, and utter the impending judgment of God? Whence came his moral earnestness and intensity of zeal for righteousness but from the Holy Spirit? The peasants used to walk many miles, and sleep upon the steps of the cathedral, that they might listen to the voice of one popularly regarded as an inspired messenger of God. Was not Whitefield inspired, when he so preached to the multitudes in Moorfields that, as the result of one day's effort, a thousand were added to his church? Was it Wesley alone, or the Spirit of the Lord God upon him, that sometimes drew thirty thousand to hear him in the natural

amphitheatre at Gwennap? Did anything of prophetic spirit and power accompany the preaching of Edwards and Finney as they went about arousing the churches and persuading thousands to repent? And did not Wendell Phillips closely resemble an old Hebrew prophet when he startled the lethargic conscience of New England by his denunciations of African slavery on American soil? If we deny that all these were inspired in any degree, it will be hard to convince the thoughtful that all the prophets from Amos to Malachi were inspired. Unless we recognize the essential elements of inspired prophecy in the best preaching of to-day, why do we pray and sing, —

“Come, Holy Ghost, our hearts inspire,
 Let us thine influence prove;
 Source of the old prophetic fire,
 Fountain of light and love.”

Are we only trying to charm ourselves with poetic analogies?

We need to rid ourselves of the notion that

God did something more, something greater, for the Hebrew prophets than he is willing to do for his chosen messengers now, and to get ourselves saturated with this truth, — that we are living in the golden age of divine manifestations and spiritual power. The Comforter is ever at hand to supply all needed wisdom and might. We, too, may be and must be inspired to speak for him. We may know the exceeding greatness of his power. When we shall have prophetic and apostolic consecration, faith, and zeal, then we shall do even greater works than they. The thought that there is no essential difference between us and them, only a difference of conditions in many ways favorable to us, will, when once fully grasped, impel us to seek more earnestly the gift of prophecy, to get the message directly from God, and then to deliver it whenever and wherever we can. To us, as well as to Jeremiah, comes the exhortation, "Call upon me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and hidden things, that thou knowest not." The lapse of time has

drawn its aureole around the heads of holy men of old, and has set them apart among the beatified or sanctified. We think, perhaps, the world will never see their like again; but coming centuries will enshrine some of the more recent prophets, and build their tombs.

The truth that God is giving an inspired revelation to the world in the best thoughts of religious minds needs to be emphasized. It is the content of what is called the Christian consciousness. Such thought, says a recent writer, "in being human, is not necessarily non-divine. It is God's own thought, spoken out and revealed through human channels. It is the divine word embodied in flesh. . . . We can draw no sharp distinctions between the human mind discovering truth and the divine mind imparting revelation. It is this conviction of the ultimate unity of the best in man with the divine, which alone can justify the attempt to establish on reasonable grounds belief in the existence of God, or to prove the authenticity of any utterances pur-

porting to come from him.”¹ How can we recognize the utterance of God in the sacred Scriptures unless there is a divine revelation within us, by which all other revelation is to be judged? Here appeal is made in vain to miracles. Miracles cannot substantiate an untruth. At best they can only call attention to an utterance that claims to be from God, which then must be judged by its own intrinsic worth. God is ever immanent in his people, and directly authenticates his revelation wherever it is perceived. Whether in reading the Psalms of the Old Testament or the hymns of the church, the writings of the apostles or the classic religious literature of the centuries, God’s great confirmatory Amen to truth resounds in every Christian soul.

One test of an inspired utterance is that it inspires somebody — not everybody, because some persons seem to be incapable of being inspired, and others will not yield themselves to divine influence. Some, doubtless, listened to Christ with hearts unmoved. Yet, as a

¹ FREDERIC PALMER’S “Studies in Theologic Definition,” p. 27.

rule, what comes from God will touch the divine that is left in human nature, and draw it upward to its native source. Judged by this test, inspired prophecy surely has not ceased. The words of Hebrew prophets never more inspired their hearers than the utterances of some of God's messengers in recent times. Let no one be misled here by loose definitions of inspiration as held by poets and enthusiasts. It means something more than emotional good feeling that may be aroused by fine rhetorical phrases and pathetic appeals, more than the magnetic thrill of excitement that follows bursts of natural eloquence, more than the enthusiasm of an hour that hurries men away to deeds of valor. It means divine impulse that accompanies truth spoken by lips touched with heavenly fire, unto nobler, holier, more unselfish lives. No inspiration was ever more genuine than this, or more needed than now. Its effects prove its divine origin.

The objection may be made that any upstart may claim to be inspired, and set

himself up as an authority in opposition to the sacred Scriptures, like Mohammed with his Koran, or the authors of the Mormon Bible. This objection is founded on the failure to observe the distinction between inspiration and revelation. The latter does not necessarily accompany the former. Let who-soever will claim the inspiration of the Divine Spirit; but when any one offers a revelation as from God, let the claim be established by sufficient evidence. Let this pretended revelation be compared with other revelations acknowledged to be of God; for God must be consistent with himself. Especially let us refer all such claims for decision to the supreme revelation of truth and of God made in and by Jesus Christ. "The Spirit tells me thus," says the fanatic. Well, how happens it that the Spirit never told that to any one else? How happens it that it contradicts, perhaps, the teachings of the wisest and best in all ages? Has God allowed all the rest of the world to be deceived? Has he been waiting for this fanatic to enlighten

the world? If indeed new truth has dawned, let its harmonious relationship to the whole system of truth be shown. Then all lovers of truth will confess its divine origin. This was the method of the Hebrew prophets. Their utterances did not contradict previous revelations, but made a broader application of the principles of truth and righteousness involved therein, and further unfolded the plans of God. Thus every successive prophet built upon foundations already laid. Our Foundation is still more secure. He who now claims to have a message from the Lord must show its harmony with the incarnate Word.

It might be helpful to a just interpretation of prophecy to note the effect of inspiration upon style of discourse. Almost any one can speak well when his subject is as a fire shut up in his bones. All the faculties of his soul are then aroused, and the speaker is often said to outdo himself. Figures of speech are perfectly natural to impassioned utterance. There is some truth in the old thought that poetry is the re-

sult of the divine afflatus. The Latin *vates* and the Greek *προφήτης* signify both poet and interpreter of the will of the gods. It is not strange that many of the Hebrew prophecies are poetic in thought and form, and of the highest order of eloquence. Religious feeling and faith have always expressed themselves in sacred song. The real, practical belief of the church can better be learned from its hymns than from its dogmas. The best theology of the Old Testament is found in the Psalms, and in the outbursts of the heart of Isaiah. The poetry and rhetoric of the Bible ought not to be interpreted as literal statements of dogmatic theology. Let the expositor who has no music in his soul pass over such passages, or rather let him first be filled with celestial harmonies and prophetic fire before beginning his task.

It is the Holy Spirit that gives a mouth and wisdom that all adversaries cannot gainsay or resist. There is a natural and a Spirit-wrought eloquence that the schools cannot reproduce. There is also a studied imitation of the one

and of the other. Some seem to think that the gift of God, the convincing and persuasive power of the Spirit, may be purchased by practising the arts of oratory. Rhetorical finish of speech will always attract attention and please the listeners, but the preacher must have something more than these. He must have something to say, and a burning impulse to say it. Then thought shapes itself in winged words. As said of Ulysses at the court of Troy, —

“No mortal then would dare to strive with him
For mastery in speech.”

He is an orator without knowing it. The truth gets home. The hearers lose thought of the speaker in earnest consideration of the message. This is real as distinguished from artificial eloquence.



V.

PREDICTIVE PROPHECY.

It is no exaggeration to say that the prophetic Scriptures are at this moment inspiring more men, speaking to more men for God, giving more men larger and fresher conceptions of things divine and human, than at any previous age in the history of the church. This is only another way of saying that as a result of criticism the inspiration of the prophetic books has had freer play, and is working more powerfully and fruitfully than it has ever done before. If there has been loss, the gain has far outweighed the loss; but it is by no means plain that the supposition should be granted. The old way of vindicating prophecy by pointing to the ruins, or want of ruins, at Babylon, and to the fishermen's nets at Tyre, had something painfully unproductive about it. It might be unobjectionable, but it never took one farther forward. . . . We owe criticism a debt for liberating, as it were, the spirit of prophecy, and giving it free course in the church."

PROFESSOR JAMES DENNEY.

V.

PREDICTIVE PROPHECY.

THUS far prophecy has been considered apart from the predictive element that is often but not always found therein. It is certain that the Hebrew prophets did foretell the future, and that many of their predictions had a striking fulfilment. It has been the habit of those who write the evidences of Christianity to point out the minute correspondence between prediction and history ; and in the desire to strengthen the argument they have sometimes misconceived the prophecy, finding prediction where it is not, and sometimes they have distorted the facts of history, claiming fulfilment where the claim must be denied. Thus a labored endeavor has been made to verify an assumed definition of prophecy as a writing of history beforehand. According to such interpreters, the main object of prophecy was to furnish to

far distant generations proofs of the divine origin of the Scriptures. For example, two hundred years before the events foretold, Isaiah speaks comfortably to Jerusalem by declaring that her walls, yet to be laid in ruins, shall be rebuilt, and that the grandchildren of distant posterity shall return from Babylonian captivity. Daniel has been made to declare centuries in advance the detailed vicissitudes of the Grecian and Roman Empires. There is indeed something "painfully unproductive" in such interpretation of prophecy. It makes the prophet of little use to his own generation, and barren of spiritual results to his readers in distant ages.

The critical study of the Bible has greatly modified such interpretation. The claim is made by many scholars that the first six books of the Old Testament are a late compilation of four leading documents, which were composed between 900 B.C. and 450 B.C. These documents rested upon earlier writings and oral traditions, going back to the time of Moses and beyond. Professor Briggs gives

the names of seventy-nine European professors of Old Testament exegesis, who are substantially of accord in this view; and he challenges any one to name an opposing authority in the great universities of Europe.¹ The majority of American scholars in the same field of study agree with these European interpreters. It is now, too, pretty well agreed among students of the Old Testament that a large part of the Book of Isaiah was written during or just after the Babylonian exile, and that the Book of Daniel was composed in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, about 165 B.C. The unanimity upon these points among scholars, rationalistic and evangelical, is scarcely less than that concerning the origin of the books of Moses. Thus many of the predictions contained in those parts of Scripture are such only in form. In fact, they are narrations of ancient history. The predictive form was sometimes chosen, as in Daniel, in order to furnish a fitting literary introduction to real prediction

¹ See "The Higher Criticism of the Hexateuch," pp. 143, 144.

concerning events immediately at hand, and concerning the Messianic kingdom. The present writer does not assume the infallibility of such interpretation, neither does he presume to set at naught the studied opinions of such an array of competent judges. It is evident, however, that defenders of the Christian faith, if they would ground their arguments in admitted truth and so win their cause, must shift their base. The ruins of Tyre, Babylon, Nineveh, etc., will no longer furnish arguments of weight to questioning minds. If prophecy must be interpreted on a different basis, a favorite argument may be weakened, but much to compensate may be gained thereby. If we part with a minute, predicted revelation of history, we may gain a better revelation of God; and to reveal God was the main purpose of prophecy.

There is no evidence that the history of the past has been miraculously revealed to any one. The sacred writers usually tell us the sources from which they derive their information. Twenty-seven books now lost are

cited in the Old Testament. The opening verses of Luke's Gospel acquaint us with his painstaking, historical research. "It is not history, but the *meaning* of history, which is revealed to a prophetic soul."¹ The prophets, knowing the meaning of the past, could in some measure predict the future. Their utterances were based upon the unchangeability of God's moral government. The purpose of their predictions has been well termed ethico-religious; i.e., to convey moral and religious instruction, primarily to the people of their own times. They had seen cities and nations overthrown because of wickedness. It was a fixed factor of their theology that righteousness and wickedness receive their reward and punishment in this life. Their ignorance of a judgment after death, and of a future life based upon moral conduct in this, led them sometimes to err in interpreting the details of human history. Every sin, according to their theology, ought to be pun-

¹ Professor Ladd's "Doctrine of Sacred Scripture," vol. ii., p. 414.

ished here. If the transgressor does not bear his penalty, then his descendants must, even to many generations. An illustration of this is shown in 2 Kings xxiii. 25, 26. The writer could not understand how Josiah, the ideal king, "that turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might," could be defeated and slain in battle in the prime of life. He offers the explanation that the Lord's wrath was kindled against Judah because of the provocations of a previous king, Manasseh, who, although "he shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another,"¹ died in peace, and was buried with his fathers. The theology of this writer is corrected by Jeremiah² and by Ezekiel.³

A similar insight into the moral government of God over the nations is expressed in the oft-quoted saying of an American statesman, "The longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see that God governs in the affairs of men." In the times of the

¹ 2 Kings xxi. 16. ² Jer. xxxi. 29, 30. ³ Ezek. xviii. 2-4.

Hebrew prophets, wickedness abounded, and therefore thrones and dynasties were of brief duration. Drawing ready inference from general principles, they were safe in foretelling the destruction of idolatrous and sinful nations, and the oppression and captivity of backsliding Israel. Hence the prediction was of the nature of a promise or a threatening. Its fulfilment was conditioned on the moral attitude of the people concerned. The principle is clearly stated by Jeremiah.¹ "At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; if that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; if it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them." The same principle of moral

¹ Jer. xviii. 7-10.

government is applied to persons by Ezekiel.¹ Both show the conditional nature of prophecy. Jonah's reluctant prophecy concerning the destruction of Nineveh is represented as unfulfilled because of changed conditions. There should be no surprise, then, at the fact, or reluctance to admit it, that some prophecies have been unfulfilled, and from the nature of the case never will be fulfilled. The principle underlying the prophecy remains forever true, but the application of the principle in detail to future events was not always accurate. Amos declared that the Lord would "rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword."² The context clearly shows that it was the thought of Amos that Israel would be conquered and led into captivity in that generation, but it was nearly forty years before the prophecy was fulfilled.

Jeremiah³ exiled in Egypt, and Ezekiel⁴ in Babylon, learning of the devastating march of Nebuchadnezzar's army, predicted the con-

¹ Ezek. xxxiii. 13-16.

³ Jer. xliii.

² Amos vii. 9

⁴ Ezek. xxx.-xxxii.

quest of Egypt by him, the destruction of her gods, and the dispersion of her people. "There shall be no more a prince of the land of Egypt." "I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations, and will disperse them through the countries." These prophecies were not fulfilled according to the expectations of Ezekiel. Shall we therefore deny his inspiration? The wonder is that hope and faith in God, and sure expectation of the rebuilding of Jerusalem, with the destruction of all her foes, burned undimmed in his soul. Even Renan cannot withhold his admiration. "In those years Ezekiel's passionate soul attained a height in which human nature has rarely maintained itself. The reconstruction of Jerusalem was so little doubted by this imperturbable believer that all his thoughts were occupied by plans, often eccentric, for arranging the future society in harmony with the spirit of the prophets, whose work he ardently continued."¹

Isaiah foretold that Damascus would be

¹ "History of the People of Israel," vol. iii., p. 333.

“taken away from being a city, and it shall be a ruinous heap.”¹ The spirit of his prophecy was fulfilled not long after in the capture of the city by Tiglath-pileser; but Damascus was not destroyed, and is still standing. To say that the exact words of Isaiah will yet be fulfilled indicates an entire misunderstanding of the nature of inspired prediction. Ezekiel, seeing the war-cloud arising in the East, predicts the immediate and complete destruction of Tyre by Nebuchadnezzar. “I will make thee like the top of a rock: thou shalt be a place to spread nets upon; thou shalt be built no more.” Sixteen years later Ezekiel corrects his own prediction, declaring that Nebuchadnezzar “had no wages, nor his army, for Tyrus, for the service that he had served against it,” although he besieged it thirteen years. The prophet gives him the land of Egypt, with her spoil, as a recompense for service against Tyre, “and it shall be wages for his army.”² Some expositors feel bound to maintain that Nebuchadnezzar actu-

¹ Isa. xvii. 1. ² Cf. Ezek. xxvi. 1-14 with xxix. 17-20.

ally did capture insular Tyre, but this claim is denied by most recent historians.¹ Others say the prediction was exactly fulfilled at the

¹ The older commentators and historians, following the unauthorized statement of Jerome, held that Ezekiel's prophecy was fulfilled by Nebuchadnezzar. Rawlinson inclines to that view, yet leaves the matter in 'doubt, saying, "Tyre, if it fell at the end of its thirteen years' siege," etc. — "The Fourth Monarchy," chap. viii.

Sayce, in his "Ancient Empires of the East," p. 192, declares that Tyre was not taken by Nebuchadnezzar. "After a siege of thirteen years he consented to treat with the Tyrian king, Ethbaal (B.C. 674), and was thus left free to turn his arms against Egypt."

Von Ranke, in his "Universal History," vol. i., p. 89, very much doubts if insular Tyre was besieged. "It is nowhere recorded that Tyre was conquered."

Friedrich Delitzsch, in "Geschichte Babylonians und Assyrians," p. 244, says, "The Chaldean king blockaded the city from the mainland but his efforts; according to all accounts, even that of Ezekiel, were fruitless."

Vaihinger, in "Schaff-Herzog Encyclopædia" (Art. Tyre), says it was "besieged by Nebuchadnezzar, but in vain."

Duncker, in his "History of Antiquity," vol. iii., p. 353, Eng. Ed., says, "Ezekiel looked forward to the speedy success of the Babylonians, and the immediate fall of the great trading city. . . . Those prophecies were not fulfilled in their whole extent. The siege, after the capture of the old city, was no more than a blockade from the mainland." In a note he acknowledges, following a general statement of Berosus, that

hands of Alexander the Great.¹ But Ezekiel said that Nebuchadnezzar would destroy Tyre, and had no thought of postponing the event three centuries. Let one have all the future for the fulfilment of the prediction, and one can safely foretell the complete destruction of almost any city on the face of the earth, as Macaulay pictured the ruins of London. The argument, based on minute fulfilment of prediction, creates more unbelief than it removes. It is not to be supposed that the prophets foresaw the details of the future more accurately than they were able to learn those of the past. Minute errors, either of history or

Tyre, "though not captured, was subjugated by the Babylonians."

Professor Smend of Basel, in his "Commentary on Ezekiel," says, "The assertion of the church fathers is now defended by few," and after reviewing the historical evidences concludes thus, "We must therefore abide by the confession of Ezekiel." He refers to Ezek. xxix. 21, where the prophet is promised an "opening of the mouth;" i.e., the failure of his former prophecy had rendered him speechless against reproaches. He was to make a new one that would restore his reputation.

See also Kendrick's "Phoenicia," p. 385.

¹ Hopkins's "Evidences of Christianity," p. 333.

prediction, do not invalidate the substantial truth of their writings. The evidence is clear that they were wonderfully acute discerners of the signs of the times. Such spiritual discernment is the result of inspiration, and belongs in some measure to the pure in heart of all times. Let it be frankly admitted that Isaiah xlv. 1, 2, was not literally fulfilled, that the gods of Babylon were not overthrown or carried into captivity, but were rather reinstated in authority by Cyrus at the conquest of that city; admit, too, that the Assyrian host did not approach Jerusalem at the time or in the manner indicated in Isaiah x. 24-32.¹ These are only poetic colorings. Shall the prophet be allowed no use of his imagination?

Ancient prophecy took its form from contemporary events and conditions. War frequently meant the extermination of the conquered. Extravagant phraseology was used both in history and in prophecy. In the inscription

¹ See George Adam Smith on Isaiah in *Expositor's Bible*, vol. ii., p. 178 f., and vol. i., p. 170 f.

on the famous Moabite stone, King Mesha declares that he destroyed Israel "with an everlasting destruction," yet Israel soon after became his conqueror. Joel represents the surrounding nations, Phœnicia, Egypt, and Edom, assembled in the valley of Jehoshaphat for battle. The issue is a complete triumph of Jerusalem with prodigies in the heavens. "The sun and the moon shall be darkened, and the stars shall withdraw their shining." "Egypt shall be a desolation, and Edom shall be a desolate wilderness," while Judah shall abide forever. This is the poetic way of saying that God is ever the defence of his people. The imagery is drawn from the customs of the times. The prophecy has never been literally fulfilled. It is probable that Joel himself did not expect such a fulfilment.¹ For us to expect a literal fulfilment in the future is due to inability to see through the figurative and symbolical to the spiritual. The spirit of the prophecy has progressive illustration in

¹ Joel iii. 12 ff. Jehoshaphat (Yahveh judges) may be used symbolically, without reference to the valley of Kidron.

all ages. The true people of God are triumphing, and his enemies are being overthrown. The same spirit of prophecy in Faber prompted him to write, —

“For right is right, since God is God;
And right the day must win;
To doubt would be disloyalty,
To falter would be sin.”

By insisting upon exact fulfilment of prediction, and by endeavoring to find it in history, expositors have gotten themselves and their readers into labyrinths of perplexity, in which some delight to wander about. No two seem to be following the same thread. A few have claimed to see the way out of the mazes, and have appointed the year and the day for the grand consummation when all prophecies shall have been literally fulfilled. All such interpretations have brought ridicule upon their believers, and injury to the Christian religion. Yet immediately others would seek to recast the predictions, and to fit them to other historical events. Thus the unprofitable work goes on. Calvin doubtless had

good cause for prohibiting the interpreting of the Apocalypse in the churches of Geneva. We cannot help thinking that the difficulty lies in an entire misconception of the nature of prediction, as though it were based upon a vision of the future as a long-extended panorama. A better clew to its interpretation will be found if we base it upon the prophet's spiritual insight into the events of past and on-going history, upon his mighty faith in God as the moral Ruler over all, and upon his expectation of speedy fulfilment. A study of contemporaneous and immediately succeeding history will best determine the meaning of prophecy. Historical and archæological investigations will often, too, fix the time of the prophecy itself. The critical apparatus for a study of ancient history has been somewhat deficient till recent times, and this may be why better known events of later history have been so often fitted to the words of ancient seers. It is deplorable to still see the maps, charts, and short-lived publications that profess to reveal the secrets of the future,

even to the day and the hour, that Christ declared himself ignorant of.

The prophet has been aptly called the storm petrel of the world's history. His spirituality makes him a discoverer of the signs of the times. He ascends the watchtower, and surveys the movements of the nations.¹ Babylon will surely fall before the already moving chariots and hosts of Sargon. He looks again over Edom. The night of silence rests upon it. He cannot now see the end. The messenger must return again. The inspired seer does not profess to know everything. Of some things he feels sure enough to speak out. Babylon, though captured, rose to supremacy. Another watchman foresees her troops leading away Judah into captivity. Faith long foretells the return of a remnant, and when Cyrus is already seen conquering all before him fixes more definitely the time. In like manner New Testament prophets plainly see the forces in operation that must lead to the destruction of Jerusalem, and often

¹ Isa. xxi.

speak of that event, from Matthew to Revelation. With that event was associated either typically or literally the end of the world or age. The best commentary upon such passages is a full history of the times aided by a poetic imagination. Some have interpreted prophecy just as they have parable, insisting that every minute particular, every descriptive phrase, all poetic coloring, must have a definite historical counterpart. Such are bound to have an illustration go on all fours, and they bewilder and confound the faith of simple souls.

In contending for the supernatural element in prophecy, it is not wise to deny the natural, nor to insist upon the unnatural. The explanatory cause need not be greater than the effect. Revelation of truth is by means of the natural, intuitive power of the soul, plus the special operation of the Holy Spirit. This special, or so-called supernatural, action of the Spirit does not differ in its nature from his ordinary action. Here the natural and the supernatural meet. The supernatural

may be called in such case an intensification of the natural. Thus may be interpreted the statement of Max Müller, "History teaches us that nothing is so natural as the supernatural." Whether an event be supernatural or natural may depend upon one's point of view. The power of foreseeing events in the near future may be quite natural to some souls when filled with the divine Spirit. The seemingly miraculous powers of the witch of Endor are fully explained by the phenomena of modern hypnotism. Balaam's vision, "having his eyes open,"¹ suggests the state now well known as waking trance. The ecstasy of Saul has many modern parallels. To say that the human mind in certain persons and states has no power of foretelling the future in an inexplicable manner is more than can now be safely affirmed.² Would it not be worthier of God, if we should be forced to conclude that he awakened in the ancient seers dormant and unknown powers, rather than momen-

¹ Num. xxiv. 16.

² See Van Norden's "Psychic Factor," pp. 103-110.

tarily gave a new power and then withdrew it? Let God have the glory, whether we can explain his action or not. He moves in nature no less than in the supernatural. He is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever; and if we can better find out his uniform methods of action so as to explain some events hitherto considered miraculous, then those events become more rather than less divine and wonderful. Thus God is glorified the more, and the faith of his people is strengthened. Not all his ways in either the past or the present have been explained, but the conviction is growing that the supernatural would appear perfectly natural if we could attain God's point of view. And if by the supernatural is meant his direct action, then we affirm that God is everywhere and always directly active; and this is the stupendous miracle of the universe.

From what has thus far been written, it may be seen also that the predictive element of prophecy is not a thing altogether of the past. A great faith is always predictive.

The coming One, who shall rule in righteousness, is always at hand to him who believes in God. In a very, very little while he will surely come; he will not tarry. Faith is spiritual foresight. It is the confident assurance one feels concerning things hoped for, the inward demonstration of things not seen.

“Far into distant worlds she pries,
And brings eternal glories near.”

Faith is based upon God in us, rather than upon any specific promises of the Bible. Have faith in God, and glorious predictions will fill the soul. This makes the optimist, who sees through temporary defeats to final victory. This moved Whittier long before the day of abolition of slavery to write:—

“I have not seen, I may not see,
My hopes for man take form in fact;
But God will give the victory
In due time; in that faith I act.”

Have we not here a modern prediction? and did its fulfilment, even before the expected time, prove the prediction to have been

inspired of God? Nay, that is not the highest proof. We know that stanza is the inspiration of the divine Spirit from its godlike character; and though slavery were to last ten thousand years, every true believer would confidently expect the complete fulfilment of Whittier's prediction. We have a "Thus saith the Lord" for it in our own souls. Religious poetry in all ages is full of such prediction.

The conscientious person feels the dominion of a righteous God, or he is convinced, as Matthew Arnold would say, of an "enduring power, not ourselves, that makes for righteousness." To affirm the personality of the "power" seems to us more religious and more philosophical. The hand of God, or the reign of righteousness, have it as thou wilt, is seen also by this conscientious person in national affairs. He rightly infers that the same Being or "power" that works in him is also working in others. The Puritan fathers were guided by God to American shores. They so felt and affirmed. Can any

one who has prophetic insight deny it? God overruled in the Revolutionary and Civil Wars. All admit it. So common is the recognition of God in our national history, that there is stamped upon our coins, "in God we trust." Some time before the unification of Germany and of Italy, a European statesman — was it Mazzini? — predicted the rise of three great monarchies, and that these would be the precursors of great republics. The first part of the prediction has been fulfilled in Italy, Germany, and Austria-Hungary. Who that reads the signs of the times doubts the ultimate fulfilment of the second part? Would any prophet endanger his reputation were he now to foretell the downfall of the Turkish Empire, and the division of the same among European powers? A statesmanlike acquaintance with diplomacy might enable one to tell in some details the manner of the downfall; and if such prediction were fulfilled in general, and not in all its particulars, would it be said that it was destitute of spiritual insight, and was the utterance of

a false prophet? The missionary enthusiast declares that the kingdoms of this world will soon become the kingdom of the Lord and of his Christ. The faith of the seer of Patmos was so great that his *soon* was *now*. What makes the modern prophet so confident of the speedy triumph of Christianity? Is it because he believes the "promises" of ancient prophets? Is it not rather because he feels an indorsement of their faith made by the voice of God within him? One must be himself a prophet in order to interpret prophecy, just as the poet alone understands poetry, and the artist art.

VI.

MESSIANIC PROPHECY.

“THE prophets anticipated the early dawn of Messianic times. The energy of their faith and hope brought the blessing exceedingly near, and it seemed just on the borders of their historical horizon. In this way, and not from the visionary nature of the revelation given to them, it is to be explained that the blessings of the Messianic times are always the cheerful background of the picture in which they portray coming judgments.

PROFESSOR EDUARD RIEHM.

VI.

MESSIANIC PROPHECY.

“HOPE springs eternal in the human breast.” Without it life would be dreary indeed, if not insupportable. Man is by nature progressive, always looking forward to something better. He is contented only as he is advancing. To sit down and content one’s self in the present, with no thought of effort for improvement, is the mark of an ignoble mind. To cease one’s longings and strivings for a better state evidences loss of faith and utter discouragement.

Hope comes to the rescue especially in adversity. When one’s condition is less fortunate or desirable than in the past, distress seizes the soul. No ease till the former prosperity has been regained or enhanced. Paradise must be re-entered, since no home can be found outside. Dante represents Francesca as saying:—

“No greater pain
Than to recall the time of happiness
In midst of misery.”¹

That saying may be true in hopeless “Inferno,” but in this life something whispers in nearly every mournful heart the song of Byron:—

“Hours splendid as the past may still be thine,
And bless thy future as thy former day.”

Hope shines brightest when her lamp is trimmed by religion. Expectation of earthly good may be extinguished. A cheerless lot may be patiently endured by making a virtue of necessity. Then it is that hope shines beyond the limits of the present life, and reveals the glories of the eternal world. Hope must have a basis. If that cannot be found in man or circumstances, God is her firm foundation. All else may fail. He remaineth sure. “Why art thou cast down, O my soul? Hope thou in God,” and in no other. This hope in

¹ “*Nessun major dolore
Che ricordarsi del tempo felice
Nella miseria.*” — “Inferno,” v. 120-123.

God has always been the stay of the prophet and reformer. He feels himself to be in partnership with God. His cause must succeed because it is a righteous one. No matter how many foes, what difficulties and temporary reverses, what false friends and faint-hearted followers, his watchword is Im-manuel, "God with us." It is God within us who invites to better days. No man can ever be hopeless if God is enshrined in his soul. Delay only intensifies his expectation of good. He grasps the future as though it were present. The goal is ever in view, and shuts out surrounding scenes. This element of the spirit of prophecy is common to all who have not lost faith in God and righteousness, and is most conspicuous in those who live nearest to God. Among the Hebrew prophets, Isaiah displays this hope in God in a special degree. Nothing daunts him,—neither the black war-cloud lowering over the northern horizon, nor the unnumbered forest of Assyrian spears in full view. God will raise up a deliverer, and defend or redeem his chosen

people. National scourges always meant chastisement to him, never destruction. His song was always that of the Christian pilgrim, "Deliverance will come." To him Jerusalem was inviolable, and the throne of the house of David could not be overthrown. Even the wicked and faithless Ahaz could not destroy the faithfulness of God, and so he sings:—

"To us a child of hope is born,
To us a son is given.
The Wonderful, the Counsellor,
The mighty Lord of heaven."¹

Since this hope is based in God as the source of all good, it naturally grows into a longing desire and trustful expectation of finding out God, whom to know is the highest good conceivable. The prayer of the devout soul has always been, "I beseech thee, show me thy glory," and "O that I knew where I might find him!" This longing has been the prophecy of its own fulfilment. Desire awakens hope; hope kindles faith; faith soon becomes conviction; convic-

¹ Cf. Isa. ix. 6, 7; xi. 1-10.

tion expresses itself in "It shall come to pass." This seems to be the natural basis of Messianic prophecy, which among the Hebrews became clearer and clearer in its outlines until the fulness of time had come. We have no sympathy with that style of interpretation that finds a definite prediction of Christ on almost every page of the Old Testament. The saying concerning the "seed of the woman," whenever it originated, was uttered of the human race, and afterward pressed into service by the theologians. It would be better not to build any further upon Jacob's mention of "Shiloh"¹ till the meaning of the word is better ascertained. If a prophecy of the Messiah can be found there, no difficulty will be experienced in finding it almost anywhere else. It is as easy to prove that Judah still retains the sceptre, as that he retained it till the beginning of the Christian era. Jewish commentators with hearts full of Messianic longings, and Christian theologians hunting for proof-

¹ Gen. xlix. 10.

texts, have seen in Balaam's Star ¹ a prediction of Christ. Arguments based on such passages of Scripture may be convincing to those who are already convinced, or they may lead the thoughtful into scepticism, seeing how far pressed the theologians are to find evidences of prediction. The argument founded on Messianic prophecy has no need of such feeble support. The expectation of the Messiah is abundantly expressed in the Old Testament. His nature and office-work become clearer with the progress of revelation. The condition of the Jewish nation furnished the changing types under which he was foretold. Until the monarchy was overthrown he was expected as a king of the Davidic line, who should restore and extend the dominions of Israel, and who himself, or in the persons of his rightful successors, should rule in righteousness for ever and ever. All desirable things were pictured under his sway. Divine names and attributes were given him much the same as they were by the

¹ Num. xxiv. 17.

neighboring heathen nations to their kings.¹ The writers of sacred poetry especially sought to glorify the Messiah in words strictly applicable only to Deity. Such expressions cannot with fairness be pressed into service as proof-texts of the divinity of Christ. The sacred writers had in mind the exaltation of the soon-expected, anointed king rather than the humiliation and incarnation of God.

After the overthrow of the Jewish monarchy hope still looked for a Deliverer, but now he is represented under the type suggested by the condition of Israel during the Babylonian captivity. He is the Suffering Servant of Jehovah. He is to redeem and save his people, not now by military conquest, but by endurance of pain and oppression. God's chastening hand is upon him. He suffers, not because of his own sins, but for the sins of Israel. He is a willing sacrificial victim, bearing the iniquities of many, and by self-sacrificing love he wins

¹ See Cheyne and also Smith on Isa. ix. 6.

the spoils of conquest. Some see in the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah only a personification of Israel crushed down by cruel bondage. The description is true to historical facts, but prophetic faith looks though passing history to a Deliverer made like unto his brethren. The prophet of the exile sees a fulfilment of old prophecies of a royal Messiah even in the Gentile Cyrus, the Lord's anointed,¹ yet this is not the complete fulfilment of the Messianic hope. The hope expands into something different and better. The prophet sees that Israel needs deliverance from sin more than from foreign oppression, and faith says God will surely supply the need. How? The disease suggests the remedy. Only a sufferer can take away suffering. There must be a sacrifice for the expiation of sin. Hence the form of the prophecy.

After the exile the priesthood was exalted above the monarchy. In Joshua, the high priest Zechariah sees the promised BRANCH²

¹ Isa. xlv. 1. ² Zech. vi. 11-13; Isa. xi. 1; Jer. xxiii. 5.

of Isaiah and Jeremiah. The offices of priest and of king seem to be combined in the prophet's thought after the patriarchal manner, for "he shall be a priest upon his throne." National prosperity, introduced and followed by righteousness, purity, and the outpouring of the Spirit, mark his sway. It is the same old Messianic hope, though its form of expression has changed because of changed conditions.

After the priests had become corrupt, Malachi, following the phraseology of Isaiah, predicts the coming of the Angel¹ of the Covenant, who shall purify the sons of Levi. Still later, when Antiochus Epiphanes had corrupted the priesthood to such extent that the altar of Zeus was set up in the temple itself, and all hope in kings and priests alike was lost, a prophet predicted the speedy advent of the Messianic kingdom in the symbolic form of one like a "Son of man," to whom is given universal and everlasting dominion.² Thus again the Messianic hope is

¹ Mal. iii. 1 ; Isa. xl. 3 ; lxiii. 9. ² Dan. vii. 13, 14.

expressed in terms suggested by and suited to the needs of the passing time.

Filled with faith and longing as they were, it could not be otherwise than that to him should all the prophets give witness. Each, according to the signs of the times, expected his speedy appearing. It is a mistake to suppose that any one of them in prophetic vision looked through a vista of centuries to a fulfilment of the present longing and pressing need of himself and of his people. What comfort and strength would the prophet afford his hearers by telling them that the Deliverer would come in some distant age? Such a conception makes prophecy too useless and tantalizing to be inspired of God. The Messiah was in their faith always close at hand. In this particular they were mistaken, not knowing what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify. Though many trustful, wistful souls were disappointed, yet the faith that God would visit, redeem, and exalt his people grew stronger and clearer, the conception of the Messiah

being modified and enlarged by ever changing circumstances, and by better revelations of God and of their own needs. Messianic prophecy was not confined to the holy men whose writings have come down to us; it was shared in some degree by all devout souls in Israel.

The hope, longing, faith, expectation, expressed in Messianic prophecy were and are the direct inspiration of God. The object of the saint's desire is God and his kingdom of righteousness. This is why the prophets in all ages are constantly foretelling the immediate coming of that kingdom, and painting its glories and beauties in changing styles of expression. The real Messiah was different from their expectation, and yet larger than their fondest hopes. Combining all excellences and good offices in himself, he easily suggests comparisons between himself and whatever of wisdom, greatness, and goodness may be seen in prophets, priests, kings, and holy men of old. We may call such men types and predictions if we will; since in har-

mony with God's eternal law of progress every good, wise, noble, holy man is a prophecy of a still better one to come. Even the revelation of all ideal excellences in Jesus, the Messiah, has not quieted this ever-living inspiration in the souls of men. Since the longing of humanity is satisfied in him, and fancy can suggest nothing better, Christians have from the beginning been watching for his second coming. Hardly was he out of sight before prayers and preparations began to be made for his return. Just how he shall return, or when, the saints are not agreed; but that he is surely coming in some way better than has been dreamed, no lover of Christ can doubt. That his kingdom is to fill the whole world, and to be an everlasting kingdom, is a conviction breathed into the soul of every one who is in harmony with God.

But how and when shall it be? The prophets are still searching. Some, instead of looking for an answer within and around themselves, as true, original prophets have always done, go back to the fading colorings and

imagery of Old Testament seers for indications of his appearing. The descriptions of his regal splendor dazzle and enchant them. They want a king that is altogether too earthly. With literal interpretations of poetic phraseology they look for the fulfilment of what was long ago in spirit fulfilled. That the Hebrews should long to see the throne of David permanently re-established at Jerusalem, and the conquest and conversion of the Gentile nations, is all very natural ; how Christian believers of the nineteenth century can cherish such longings it is difficult to understand. Such a localized Christ surely would afford little satisfaction to world-wide Christianity.

The Christ who is to come must surely satisfy the longings and needs of the spiritually minded. He met the requirements of humanity in his first coming ; he will do so in his second. What kind of a Christ does the present world need ? The answer to this question shaped ancient Messianic prophecies. Let it shape the hopes and convictions of to-day.

Before his departure Jesus promised to come

again, and to make his abode with and in his followers, so that the Father and the Son might be manifested through them unto the world. He declared that the revelation of himself in them would be the satisfaction of their hearts, as well as the continuous and convincing manifestation to the world of himself in his true nature. "I in them, and thou in me, that the world may know that thou hast sent me." This indwelling of the living Christ is described by New Testament writers as a fact powerfully revealed in consciousness. Paul felt himself so identified with him as to say, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I that live, but Christ that liveth in me." He was like the man who said he was hanged with John Brown. He was so much in sympathy with John Brown's views and aims, he loved him so much, that when that old hero swung from the gallows his friend felt as though the halter were around his own neck. So Paul constantly bore about in his body the dying of the Lord Jesus, always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake.

It was this self-crucifixion that enabled him to so powerfully preach Christ crucified. One must be like Christ, must in some measure be a Christ, in order to know him and reveal him unto others.

The disciples did not simply remember Jesus, and cherish him in their affections. They held communion with him. The Comforter revealed him unto them. They felt his presence. They partook of his holiness, wisdom, and power. In some degree they reproduced him, so that they worthily bore the name of Christians — Christ-men. Everywhere they went he was manifested in a most practical manner. Those who believed on him, as preached by and revealed in others, received a like revelation in themselves. This more and more transformed them into his image, and enlarged their capacity of knowing him. Thus the Spirit of Christ was incarnated in a new and wider sense than before his death. They were not mere imitators of Jesus, after the manner of stage-players. They had not to constantly remind themselves of the *rôle* they were play-

ing. They put on Christ not as a mask, concealing their own unchristlikeness. They were baptized into him. Christ dwelt in them, the hope of glory. To put on Christ meant with them most intimate union and communion. To express the thought in modern phraseology, we should have to say, they and Christ were all one.

It pleased the Father to reveal his Son in them, yet in such a manner as to nourish in them a longing to know him still better. Let no one fancy some strange miracle of revelation like an outward vision. That would be too much like knowing him according to the flesh. Doubtless in certain moods their thoughts of him were objectified, so that they seemed to see his form and hear his voice. Such subjective visions are real in some experiences to-day. They are not miracles, but conform to mental laws, and are peculiar to certain temperaments. Such experiences are transitory, and are not of highest value. Christ can be revealed in pure thought as well as in imagination. The truths concerning him

can be so illuminated by the Spirit, and made so real, that his presence is felt. To see is not to know. One may behold with the eyes, and yet totally misunderstand. The eyes of the understanding may be enlightened unto the full knowledge of Christ.¹ The word *unto* here means ever pressing forward *in* the knowledge gained, and *toward* a complete knowledge. This implies devout meditation and study. One cannot neglect the recorded truth concerning Christ, and still expect a miraculous manifestation of him in answer to lazy prayers.

If we were more anxious to reveal Christ to others, we should know him more clearly ourselves. To do this we must be like him. Beings totally unlike can never know each other. Their attempts to form conceptions of each other would be only partial or magnified reproductions of themselves, or some notions strange, monstrous, and false. According to the popular idea, angels are great human beings with wings. Ezekiel's cherubim were strange combinations of man and

¹ Cf. Eph. i. 17, 18, and Col. ii. 2.

beast, suggested, perhaps, by Assyrian sculptures seen during his captivity. To know an angel, one must be angelic. To know or understand a soldier is not to behold him, and listen to his narratives of battles, marches, and tent-life. This gives some truth, mingled with many misconceptions. To know a soldier, one must be a soldier. To understand and appreciate an artist, one must be an artist, in spirit at least. In other words, not imagination, but experience well interpreted in thought, is the source of true knowledge. To know Christ, one must have experience of his forgiving, saving, comforting, strengthening, sanctifying grace, made real and interpreted in thought by the Spirit who guides into such truth.

Some are longing for Christ to come in his kingdom, that they may see him as he is, and reign with him. Royalty, power, miraculous display, the inheritance of his riches, —these things they associate with his coming; for in these they wish to share. It is the same old worldly expectation of Judaism.

Isaiah's type of the Suffering Servant satisfies but few. To know him and the fellowship of his sufferings, and to be made conformable unto his death, is not the aspiration of the many. Yet it may be that the Christ most needed is still the patient Sufferer who bears in sympathy and helpfulness the woes of humanity. To realize the presence of Christ, he must be sought and received in sympathizing love as he was in his humility, and still is in lowly condescension, rather than as fancy may conceive that he will be in his millennial splendor. The world needs to know and reveal him as Friend and Saviour rather than as Judge and King. His kingdom is not of this world.

Such an appearing of Christ in the persons and lives of his followers is the world's present greatest need; for this alone can banish its sins, soothe its sorrows, cure its woes, lift its burdens, lighten its toils, and bring in heaven upon earth. God wants to manifest himself not in one Man alone, but in all men; and the pattern of his manifestation in us has

been given in the historic Christ. A loving, prayerful study of him as revealed in the Gospels will by the manifestation of the Spirit reveal him in us. We must know him as he was before we shall be prepared to see him as he is, and as he shall be. In an increasing number of prophetic souls, there seems to be a longing corresponding to the world's present need. Many are praying, "Come, Lord Jesus," who desire not so much to see him in the clouds of heaven as to possess him in the soul, and to be like him here. Cease searching ancient prophecies to learn the manner of his distant coming, and find a prophecy in your own longings, and in the groaning prayer of the world about you. He stands at the door waiting to come in and sup with you.

If the world needs such a reappearing of Christ, then since the world is ruled by infinite wisdom, love, and power, it will surely get what it needs. The manifestation of the sons of God, for which creation in earnest expectation waits, is drawing near. Divinity is shining forth more and more clearly in

Christlike lives. The coming man, who is to be a habitation of God through the Spirit, is thus to reproduce the Christ of prophecy. As all types found their fulfilment in Jesus, so also they will be fulfilled in his followers. While ancient prophets emphasized some special feature of the Messianic character, they did not entirely leave out of their picture other features portrayed by previous prophecies. Isaiah's Suffering Servant is all the more a King because of his sufferings, and Christ was never more royal than when crowned with thorns. The anointed Prince is also priestly mediator between man and God, and by self-sacrifice bears the sins of many. Both King and Priest receive the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, and thus exercise the office of prophet. As Prophet speaking the truth of God, as Priest in sacrificial mediation, as King ruling in righteous helpfulness, Christ is always the Suffering Servant of God and humanity. And when the hopes of ancient seers shall have been realized, and all God's people shall be proph-

ets speaking for him, they will also be priests in self-sacrificing mediation, and princes of righteousness and peace. The only way of attaining unto all this is through service. Whosoever would be the greatest must be the servant of all.

VII.

THE PROPHET AS MORAL REFORMER.

WHILE the Old Testament says, *Attend to conduct!* the New Testament says, *Attend to the feelings and dispositions whence conduct proceeds!* And as attending to conduct had very much degenerated into deadness and formality, attending to the *springs* of conduct was a revelation, a revival of intuitive and fresh perceptions, a touching of morals with emotion, a discovery of religion similar to that which had been effected when Israel, struck with the abiding power, not of man's causing, which makes for righteousness, and filled with joy and awe by it, had in the old days named God *the Eternal*. Man came under a new dispensation, and made with God a second covenant. — MATTHEW ARNOLD'S "Literature and Dogma," p. 81.

WHICH is the solid and sensible man, which understands most, which *lives* most? Compare a Methodist day-laborer with some dissolute, gifted, brilliant grandee, who thinks nothing of him! — but the first deals successfully with nearly the whole of life, while the second is all abroad in it. Compare some simple and pious monk at Rome with one of those frivolous men of taste whom we have all seen there! — each knows nothing of what interests the other; but which is the more vital concern for a man: conduct, or arts and antiquities? — *Idem*, p. 213.

VII.

THE PROPHET AS MORAL REFORMER.

No phrase of Scripture better characterizes the Hebrew prophets than this: "A preacher of righteousness."¹ They insisted upon the union of morality with religion; in fact, that religion without morality is simply irreligion. They exalted the moral and spiritual above the ceremonial and dogmatic. With them orthodoxy belonged to life rather than to creed. All the prophets from Samuel onward unite with him in saying that "to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." The meaningless and insincere offering of sacrifices and observance of ceremonial rites disgusted their righteous souls. As a contrast to religious formalism, Micah sums up the whole duty of man: "What doth the Lord require of thee but

¹ 2 Pet. ii. 5.

to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" The Scriptures may be searched in vain to find a condemnation of religious opinions or beliefs honestly held. Righteousness of life is God's test of character. Isaiah's exhortation is: "Put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgment; relieve the oppressed; judge the fatherless; plead for the widow." Amos had just repeated the same strain: "Hate the evil and love the good, and establish judgment in the gate." The unknown prophet of the exile speaks in like manner, contrasting the false ceremonial fast with the true: "Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?" Such is everywhere the

strain of Old Testament prophecy; and the prophets of the New Testament begin their message with: "Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand." The righteousness which is of God through faith does not make void, but establishes, the moral law. The uniform teaching of all inspired men is that the object of true religion is to make bad men good and good men better. All doctrines must be put to this test. All trees must be judged by their fruit. All churches and systems of belief must be overthrown that do not make for righteousness, and that faith which produces the noblest type of moral character will be the dominant one.

It may be needful to indicate here the relation of morality to religion. The two are inseparably joined in thought, however divorced in practice. A distinguished writer has said that "Religion contains the ideal ground of morality, and morality the real manifestation of religion."¹ If this be true, they are related

¹ Pfleiderer's "Philosophy and Development of Religion," vol. i., p. 66. Cf. Max Müller's definition, "Religion con-

as cause and effect, and so neither one can exist without the other. Where they are apparently dissociated, the religion and the morality are superficial and false. What is religion? Objectively it may be defined as a mode of worship. We speak, for example, of the Buddhistic, Mohammedan, or Catholic religion. But with this definition we are not now concerned. Religion must first exist in the soul before it can find any outward expression. Where is its seat? In thought, feeling, will, conscience? Philosophers have contended for each; and it has been the habit of theologians for a century at least to show that each philosopher had only a portion of the truth, and that religion has to do with every function of man's spiritual being. His intellect must grasp certain truth; his emotions must respond to it; his will must put it into practice under the sanctions of conscience. Loving obedience to known truth is practical

sists in the perception of the infinite under such manifestations as are able to influence the moral character of man." — "Natural Religion," p. 188.

religion. The basal truth of religion is concerning God. When he is rightly conceived, a true religion is possible. Some one has well defined religion as "faith in the reality of God, with a state of mind and mode of life in accordance with that faith." The elements of religion, then, are thought, feeling, and will, harmoniously in action, as related to God. The prophets seem intuitively to have grasped this truth, and sought to reveal more and more clearly the only true God, and to get men to act in harmony with the conception. The greatest Prophet of all, after he had revealed the Father, left to the world a pregnant summary of religious faith, "Believe in God, believe also in me."

What, now, is practical morality or righteousness of life? Admitting the existence of a Creator who is infinitely wise, holy, and good, the highest morality will consist in finding out the will of that Being, and lovingly doing it. Denying the existence of such a Being, there is no standard of moral law to which appeal can be made, and morality becomes mere utili-

tarianism. In practice a morality that leaves God out of account never has had any firm basis. Its outcome has been selfishness and vice more or less gilded. The first chapter of Romans shows the result in practical life of those who did not like to retain God in their knowledge. The prevalent immorality of England two centuries ago, of France during the last century, and of Italy to-day, is due to indifference to anything more than outward religious forms, and to the claims of God upon the individual and the nation.

The righteous man or true moralist is, then, he who seeks to find out the "God-willed moral order of the world," and to get that will realized in himself and in others. It cannot be separated from religion. If morality attempts a separation, it soon falls into Phariseism or selfish indifference. If religion separates herself from morality, she becomes hypocritical and formal. A religious faith lies back of all true morality, and a life of righteousness is the outcome of all true religion. Every one who fears God and works righteousness is accepted of him.

Possibly the opposition between morality and religion that exists in the minds of some arises from an incorrect definition of religion. It has been thought of as consisting in forms and dogmas, rather than in every-day righteousness of life. The church has emphasized doctrinal rather than ethical creeds. The Sermon on the Mount is here in strange contrast with the Nicene, Tridentine, and other confessions of faith. That sermon has been called by a modern prophet¹ the constitution of the kingdom of heaven, which Jesus came to set up on earth. It is ethical throughout. It requires assent to nothing that is not commonly believed by all honest, thoughtful men. It assumes the existence of God as Judge of moral action, and universal accountability to him, — truths revealed in conscience. It is based upon the two great principles of loving God with all the heart, and consequently of loving our fellow-man. It is an expansion of the moral preaching of Old Testament prophets. It would seem as though this were creed or

¹ Professor Herron.

constitution enough for any church; yet three hundred years later the Nicene Creed, composed of a lot of metaphysical abstractions, is forced upon unwilling members of Christ's church. There is scarcely an ethical proposition in the creed. Orthodoxy of belief continued to be the test of Christian discipleship, finding its maximum expression in the decrees of the Council of Trent, abstruse and almost interminable dogmas, to which every one must assent on pain of eternal damnation. Protestantism has never fully released herself from such mediæval shackles, though creeds are growing small by degrees and beautifully less. Wesley's General Rules are much more read and better understood than his proposed Articles of Faith. The latter could be dispensed with far better than the former. It is better still, to go back to the moral teachings of Jesus.

The aim of the modern prophet must be, not so much to get people to accept a creed or unite with a denomination, as to forsake their sins, and serve the living God. A disproportionate emphasis has been given to faith

without works. The conditions of pardon are constantly set forth in the pulpit, such is the desire to number converts and have revivals, and too little is said upon the necessity of righteous living. Or the way to become holy is pointed out without sufficiently indicating how to live holily. Hence salvation from penalty is more thought of than salvation from sin. A life of sin and orthodox belief, crowned with momentary repentance, is thought by many to be a sufficient preparation for a blissful eternity with a holy God. There is need of magnifying in the pulpit and in the theological school the neglected study of moral theology or Christian ethics. The ethical instruction of the church has been left too much to the individual conscience, perverted, it may be, by erroneous interpretations of Scripture. A general intention to do right is not sufficient for the moral guidance of babes in Christ. The application of moral principles to the minutiae of every-day life has, doubtless, been carried too far in the Roman Catholic Church, till, in fact, casuistry has been

well defined as "the art of quibbling with God." Protestantism may have leaned to the other extreme, and, in advocating the right of private judgment, may have left her uneducated adherents without sufficient moral instruction. At least the great principles of righteousness inculcated by the Head of the church ought to be definitely expounded, and applied to social, industrial, commercial, and political life. After baptism comes the preacher's greater work of teaching converts "to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you."¹

The standard of righteousness has not always been elevated to suit the progress of ethical science. Hence flagrant iniquities have been justified by appeal to supposed teachings of God in ancient times. The advocates of slavery and of abolition, of moderate drinking and of total abstinence, of war and of peace, of polygamy and of monogamy, have based their arguments upon misinterpretations of conflicting ethical be-

¹ Matt. xxviii. 20.

liefs held three thousand years ago and more. Would it not be well to inquire, what must we conclude from the history of the past and the demands of the present to be now holy and just and good? Must we prove that total abstinence is taught in the Bible, or that Jesus never drank fermented wine, before we can advocate the modern temperance movement? Shall our desire to justify everything that is written in the book of the wars of the Lord hinder us from denouncing war as a barbarity? Shall we cling to the low ethical standards of antiquity, forgetting that God is still alive, and has been teaching the world something new in moral and social science during the last two thousand years?

Few dare in the face of custom and moneyed power to cry aloud, spare not, and show the people their sins. It is not popular. There is preaching enough, perhaps, against sin in the abstract, or against concrete sins not found in the congregation; but how many are ready to go to the rich and powerful, as

Nathan went to David, and say, "Thou art the man"? Because of the prophet's negligence or cowardice the church drifts into conformity with the world, and formalism takes the place of spiritual life. The times demand more preachers of the old prophetic spirit, burning with righteous indignation against selfishness, meanness, and bigotry, who dare to rebuke the pitiless manner in which capitalists are oppressing the poor, who will champion the cause of the weak and suffering, who will cry out against the social evil that is rampant throughout the land, and growing worse every year through the silence of the clergy enforced by false delicacy, who will denounce corrupt qualities, whether national or ecclesiastical, in short, who will reason of righteousness, temperance, and a judgment to come. Such were the themes of the Hebrew prophets. The clergy should lead the van in all moral reforms, and by their influence shape the policy of municipal, State, and national governments in all that pertains to righteous-

ness. "Keep religion out of politics," has been the cry of the demagogue seeking for office and spoils, and multitudes of invertebrate Christians have thoughtlessly joined in the cry. On the contrary, the principal part of the mission of Hebrew prophets seems to have been to regulate politics, rebuke kings and governors, and denounce unholy national alliances. The prophets were the real statesmen of their times, and, though never summoned to court, often made their appearance in the capital unto the consternation of corrupt and short-sighted politicians.

"Stick to your theme," they say; "preach Christ, and let business and politics alone." But how should Christ be preached except as means to an end, as our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption? His righteousness must be, not imputed, but imparted unto us through the transforming gaze of faith. The righteousness of the law must be fulfilled in us as well as in him. Holiness of character can reveal itself only in righteous conduct in all the duties and relations of life.

It is just as necessary now, as ever, to guard against antinomianism, let-alone-ism, the perverted doctrine of imputation, and all theories that release the professed Christian from the necessity of being holy in heart and life. Righteousness of character and conduct must ever be the aim of preaching, and a faith in Christ that does not make one Christlike must be rejected as spurious.

The church itself needs reformation, always has needed it since apostolic days, always will need it till, as the bride of Christ, it is without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing. It needs reformation in doctrine, in government, in life. It can reform the world only as it reforms itself. Resistance to change, under the name of conservatism, has hindered its conquest of the world. Clinging to the traditions of the past, in spite of the new light poured upon it, the result has always been bigotry, superstition, tyranny, persecution. The church must lead, or fall out of the race. When it ceases to be the light of the world, the light that is within it is changed into

darkness, and how great is that darkness. The church cannot permit the world to do its thinking, and slowly force it to accept long proved but rejected propositions. It cannot safely allow hostile organizations to do its humanitarian work. It cannot afford to have the State develop a better, freer form of government than its own. The church must ride upon the advance move of truth-seeking thought and beneficent activity. It can more safely tolerate what appears to be of doubtful nature and tendency, than to persecute what may be of God.¹ It has more to fear from the ultra-conservative than from the progressive radical. The prophet who arises to show its cherished faults and neglected opportunities must be welcomed as a divine messenger. Faith in its own infallibility, wherever located, means stagnation and death. The church, like its individual members, must continually examine itself, whether it be in the faith.

One of the greatest prophets of this century, Frederick W. Robertson, speaks out so

¹ Acts v. 38, 39.

boldly and truly at this point, that it is well to quote him at length:—

“Two results come from all claims to infallibility and all prohibition of inquiry. They make bigots of the feeble-minded who cannot think,—cowardly bigots, who, at the bidding of their priests or ministers, swell the ferocious cry which forces a government, or a judge, or a bishop to persecute some opinion which they fear and hate,—turning private opinions into civil crime; and they make sceptics of the acute intellects which, like Pilate, see through their fallacies, and, like Pilate, too, dare not publish their misgivings.

“And it matters not in what form that claim to infallibility is made; whether in the clear, consistent way in which Rome asserts it, or whether in the inconsistent way in which Churchmen make it for their church, or religious bodies for their favorite opinions; wherever penalties attach to a conscientious conviction, be they the penalties of the rack and flame, or the penalties of being suspected and avoided and slandered, and the slur of heresy affixed to the name, till all men count him dangerous lest they, too, should be put out of the synagogue,—and let every man who is engaged in persecuting any opinion ponder it: these two things must follow,—you make fanatics, and you make sceptics; believers you cannot make.

“Therefore do we stand by the central protest and truth of Protestantism. There is infallibility nowhere on this earth; not in Rome; not in councils or con-

ventions; not in the Church of England; not in priests; not in ourselves. The soul is thrown in the grandeur of a sublime solitariness on God. Woe to the spirit that stifles its convictions when priests threaten, and the mob which they have maddened cries heresy, and insinuates disloyalty: 'Thou art not Cæsar's friend.'"¹

"The good is a great enemy to the best," says an old Greek proverb. Sloth says, "The old is good enough." Ignorance assents. When reality has drawn near to an old ideal, few like to have it elevated, and still laboriously climb upward toward it. Yet this must be done in order to progress, yea, in order to have continued existence. He who would seize the standard and bear it upward is pushed aside as an innovator and destroyer. The old ideal for which the fathers toiled, suffered, and died is too sacred to be disturbed. It has served well the past. Its defenders do not see the changed circumstances and conditions, and hence argue that it will do for all coming time. And until their eyes are opened they will and should conscientiously

¹ Sermon on the Scepticism of Pilate.

oppose all change. It is the conscientious laggard that stops the march of progress. The reverent student of antiquity is the principal opposer of new ideas. Alas! the eyes of the blind can no longer be opened by miracle, and so the prophet has to speak to hostile hearers for a long, long while. Who hath believed his report? It is a necessity that he should suffer persecution and often death, and the bitterest portion of his cup is that he suffers at the hands of good men. No wonder that the prophetic order sometimes appears to have died out.

It is the duty of one who has moral convictions to speak out. He should not be deterred by the thought that he may have occasion to change his mind. The prophets of old sometimes modified their prophecies. A true moral reformer will be open to further conviction, welcoming light from all sources. If he wait to study each question that arises out to an absolute certainty, he will rarely or never speak. The world needs men of present conviction and courage, not of fossil-

ized opinion. The basis of moral conviction is devotion to truth and righteousness, and these will be the same through changing circumstances and advancing study. Speak, then, but also listen. Speak, or the message will be withdrawn. Speak your convictions, or you will cease to have any. Speak with all the intensity of your soul, but keep on questioning and studying every controverted position. Let no conservatism despise thy youth, thy ignorance, thy station. The present cold and sinful world needs heat quite as much as light, needs your intense conviction perhaps more than your philosophical conclusion. The man who never has occasion to say, "I was mistaken," has been a silent partner in the great business of reforming and saving the world. If he has not the courage and honesty sometimes to say it, there will be no more open vision for him. Judicial blindness has fallen upon him.

"Dangerous doctrine!" This is the last protest of mere expediency. Yes, truth is dangerous stuff to handle. It is like electri-

city—it won't do to trifle with it. It is dangerous, however, only when misused, when its laws are unknown or unobserved. The most important truths seem most dangerous, because they lie so near to the borderland of error. Shall they, therefore, be hidden out of sight, or handed over to the enemy? Is the doctrine true? If so, blaze it abroad. No esoteric doctrine rightly belongs to Christianity. The immediate consequences of freedom may be license. Shall slavery, therefore, be perpetuated? Truth in its first conflict with error means pain and death. Its end is victory, peace, beneficence. The prophet and reformer will, likely enough, be stoned or sawn asunder. Well, that is infinitely better than to suppress his convictions. The truth seems to be most dangerous to those who first utter it; the danger, however, is not in the truth, but in opposition to it. Either let dynamite alone, or use it lawfully.

Poets, prophets, and reformers are the seers, the progressives, the radicals, if this last term suits better. They have something of that

spiritual insight which furnishes the short-cut to moral truth. So Whittier, who was poet, prophet, and reformer, describes the consternation of the Church, of Art, of meek Reverence, of gray-bearded Use, and of young Romance, over the ruins wrought by the Reformer. His concluding words are full of truth and hope :—

“ I looked: aside the dust-cloud rolled, —
The Waster seemed the Builder too;
Upspringing from the ruined Old
I saw the New.

’Twas but the ruin of the bad, —
The wasting of the wrong and ill;
Whate’er of good the old time had
Was living still.

.

Take heart! — the Waster builds again, —
A charmèd life old Goodness hath;
The tares may perish, — but the grain
Is not for death.

God works in all things; all obey
His first propulsion from the night:
Wake thou and watch! — the world is gray
With morning light.”

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